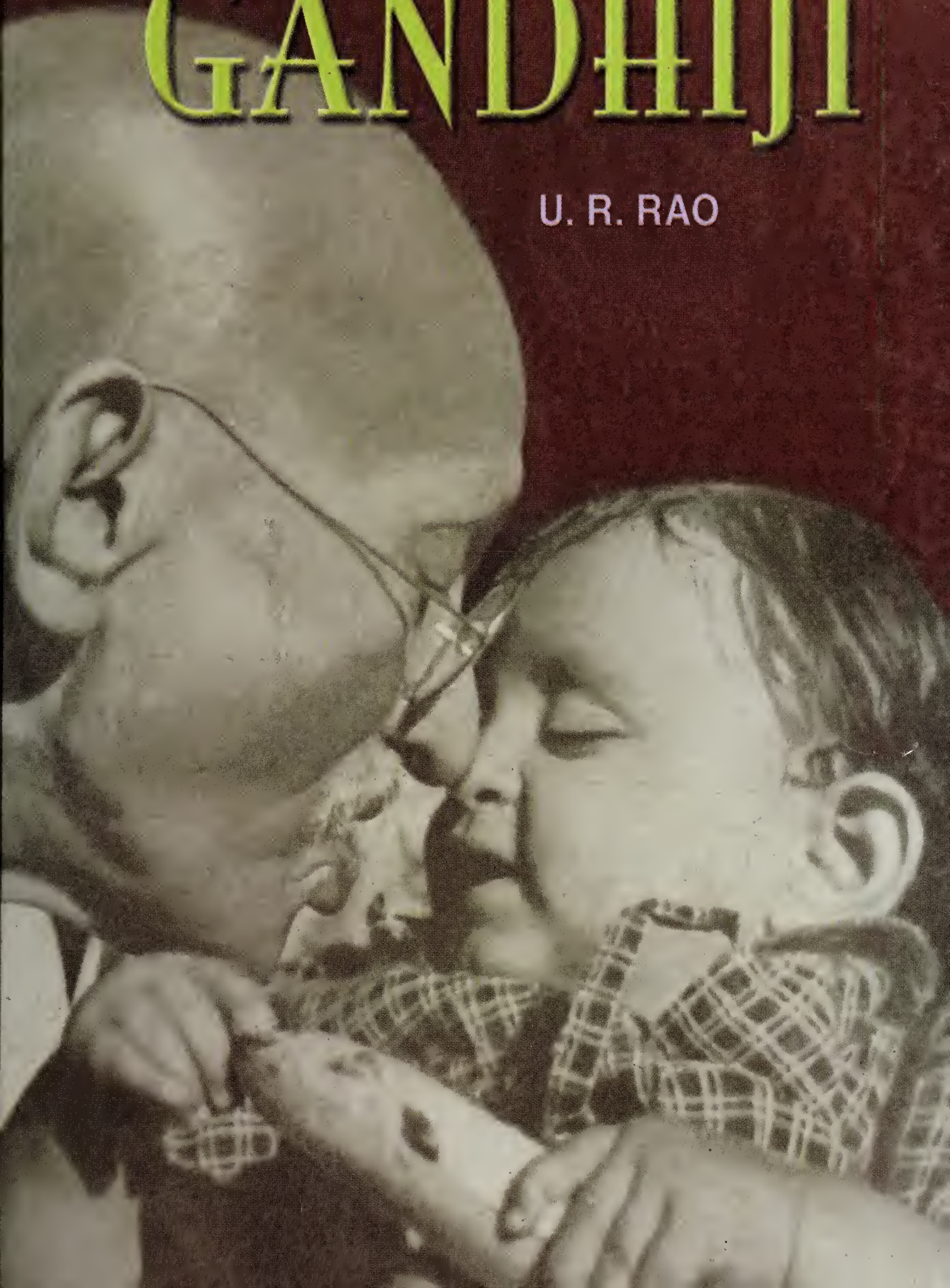



LET US KNOW

GANDHIJI

U. R. RAO





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LET US KNOW GANDHIJI

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U.R. RAO



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WHO WAS GANDHIJI ?

AN INTRODUCTION

His full name was Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi. Mohandas was his own name, Karamchand—his father's, and the surname, Gandhi, the family name.

When young he was known by various names : Manu, Moniya, Mohan and Mohandas. In South Africa, his co-workers and associates used to call him "Bhai" or brother. When he returned home to India, he was hailed as the "Mahatma", the Great Soul. Ever since, the world has honoured him as Mahatma Gandhi. But to the inmates, young and old, of his Ashram at Sabarmati, and, later, at Sevagram, he was just "Bapu" or Father, as his wife, Kasturba was "Ba" or Mother. And, as the circle of his love widened and his work covered the whole country, he became endeared to the people everywhere too, as simply "Bapu."

He was born on October 2, 1869 in Porbandar city of Kathiawar or Saurashtra, as it is now known. His father and father's father before him had been *dewans* there. His boyhood was uneventful. He was little more than average in his studies. He got into bad company, formed an evil habit or two, and made mistakes; but quickly saw, confessed and corrected them. Quite early in life, the value of truth and honesty, faith in God and regard for all religions were impressed on his mind. He married Kasturba when he was thirteen.

After matriculation in 1888, he went to England for studying law. Living a life of simplicity and hard study, he passed the London Matric and the Bar examination in 1891.

Returning home, he struggled with a meagre legal practice in Bombay and in Rajkot. In 1893, he went to South Africa for professional work. But when that was over, he did not return to settle down in India. For, he saw how he and his fellow Indians in South Africa were looked down upon by the white settlers. They were called “coolies” and were subjected to humiliation in a number of ways. He led the Indians to resist and disobey them through *satyagraha*. Excepting for two brief visits to India in 1896 and 1901-2, and two trips to Britain in 1906 and 1909, he lived for nearly 21 years in South Africa, guiding the Indians in their struggle against injustice. In the end he succeeded in getting some relief for his countrymen.

In 1915, he returned to India with his family and settled down at Kochrab and later, at Sabarmati. In the years that followed, he addressed himself to the problems of his countrymen.

His concern for the poor and the oppressed led him to take up the cause of justice to them everywhere. He supported both the poor farmers in Champaran district of Bihar and in Kheda district of Gujarat as well as the down-trodden mill workers of Ahmedabad who were denied a fair wage. In Champaran district, the peasants were being forced by European planters to grow indigo, without being paid wages; in Kheda district, during a year of famine and drought, the poor farmers were subjected to an unjust levy of land revenue. The method which Gandhiji adopted in every case of wrong and injustice was *satyagraha*, involving self-suffering and, thereby, bringing about a change of heart in the opponents. And it succeeded.

Bapu used the same means of non-violent civil disobedience or *satyagraha* for securing the freedom of his country. Only, it took different forms at different times : Non-cooperation with the British Government and its institutions, during 1920-21; Salt *satyagraha* or civil disobedience of Salt laws, in 1930-32; individual anti-war *satyagraha*, in 1940-41, and the “Quit India” movement which, but for the arrest of Bapu on August 9, 1942, would have been a final, country-wide, “Do or Die”, non-violent movement for the withdrawal of British rule from the country.

When Bapu was not in jail, or not actively leading the *satyagraha* movements, he was constantly working on his constructive programmes. This included many important activities and reforms such as *Swadeshi*, the abolition of untouchability and the uplift of *Harijans*; the promotion of communal harmony, prohibition, basic education, the revival of rural industries and *gram swaraj*. The sum total of all these programmes was *poorna swaraj*, the India of his dreams. And in all these freedom movements and constructive activities, Bapu was able to win the active cooperation not only of many leaders in the country but also of hundreds of thousands of common people. Many of them were inspired by Bapu and rose to great heights of heroism and sacrifice. Thousands faced lathi charges and firing, losing limbs and often life, entered jail again and again, suffering all sorts of hardships and indignities. The history of the world has seen many struggles for freedom, but certainly none like this where a subject people offered *satyagraha* and suffered in their own persons rather than inflict suffering on or offer violence against those who enslaved them. This unique movement was free of fear, hatred or violence; it was the challenge of the human spirit against physical might and force.

It is true that Bapu wanted freedom for his own people. But

he wanted that freedom equally for all other enslaved or oppressed people. For he stood for human freedom, equality and brotherhood everywhere. He wanted to live in "One World" or none.

It was Bapu's deep and unshakeable faith that man is governed by the law of love and not the law of the brute or the jungle, and that the law of love would always in the end win over the law of hatred; It was not a new truth to him; it was a truth as "old as the hills", as he used to say. It was there in every religion, and every prophet in the history of the world had preached that truth. And Buddha and Jesus Christ had given a supreme example of that truth in their own lives.

But the world had not heeded that truth. It had indeed ignored it at its great peril. On the contrary it had learnt to put its trust in military might, the power to subdue or destroy by force of arms and armaments.

Bapu saw clearly that this way it would lead mankind to certain destruction. The two World Wars had proved the terrible cost and the uselessness of war. And the use of nuclear bombs was a danger to the very existence of the human species. Mankind had to give up force in all its forms.

Bapu was a man of God. He saw that service of the people, the children of God, constituted the highest worship of Him. And the people meant to him, not only his own fellowmen in India, but humanity as a whole. Indeed, he claimed to belong to them and to serve them all. And to this end, he strove all his life. Indeed, he laid down his life so that men may learn to live in love and as brothers. That was his message to mankind.

To the people of India, Bapu would always be in the words of Jawaharlal Nehru "the Father of the Nation which has been shaped and trained by him for half a century.... the architect of our freedom who, embodying the old spirit of India, held aloft the torch of freedom and lighted up the darkness that surrounded

us.” And so, when the Father of the Nation passed away, on January 30, 1948, a martyr to his faith, Jawaharlal Nehru said truly : “The light has gone out of our lives....”

Men like Bapu are born once in several ages and the world mourned Bapu’s death as it had mourned few others in history. A leading statesman said in the United Nations : “From a distance, he appeared to us as already not of this world, and as a great symbol.”

The great scientist, Albert Einstein, had observed when Bapu was still with us : “Generations to come will scarce believe that such a one as this ever in flesh and blood walked upon this earth.”

What of today’s younger generation? They never saw him in real life. How then does Bapu appear to them ? What does he mean to them? Again, Jawaharlal Nehru answered these questions aptly : “To the younger generation who did not come in contact with him, he is a tradition, and numerous stories are woven round his name and activities.”

It is through these stories that the young can today come to know Bapu perhaps even better than they can through the many biographies that have been written on him.

This little book has been built out of authentic incidents and anecdotes of his life, many as told by himself, and some as recalled by others who knew him well. The material has been drawn from many original sources. And the language adopted is as simple, I hope, as the young can understand. And, if, after reading and re-reading these stories, they begin to know Bapu and the message of his life, a little more clearly, a little more meaningfully than before, my labours in preparing this book would have been more than rewarded.

1. DEVOTION TO PARENTS

Gandhiji was greatly devoted to his parents. In later life, he said : “Every moment of life I am enjoying the fruit of having served my parents as God.”

Friends sometimes spoke to Gandhiji about his parents. They often felt, when he started talking of his father and mother, that they were on holy ground.

Rev. Doke, the first European to write the story of Gandhiji’s early life, wrote of his great love for his mother. Putlibai must have been a beautiful and noble character. When Gandhiji spoke of her, his voice would soften and a light shone in his eyes. Doke could see that.



A boyhood incident influenced much Gandhiji's feelings towards his parents. He once read *Shravana Pitribhakti*, a play of Shravana's great dutifulness to his parents. Gandhiji was greatly affected by reading it.

A travelling showman showed young Mohandas a picture of Shravana carrying his aged father and mother to holy places, by means of slings fitted to his shoulders.

Both the picture and the book left a firm impression on Gandhiji's mind. He said to himself : "Here is an example for you to copy."

Shravana was killed by an arrow which King Dasharath shot by mistake. His old parents lost their only support. Their agonizing lament, made into song, remained fresh in Gandhiji's memory. As a boy he used to play the sad tune on his mouth organ.

Many years afterwards, Gandhiji explained : "I owe all I am to my parents. I felt towards them as Shravana felt towards his own parents."

What did Gandhiji learn from his parents ? What did he think of them ?

Kaba Gandhi was a firm and upright man. Gandhiji did not talk much to him. He feared and respected his father. Yet he had complete faith in him and his utter sincerity.

Bad company had led Mohandas to take meat in secret. He sometimes joined his brother, who had formed the habit. But soon he realized that deceiving and lying to one's parents was worse than eating meat in secret. He therefore gave it up.

Mohandas used to constantly attend on his father during his last years, when he was ill. He would regularly massage his legs.

From his father, Bapu learnt methodical work; close attention to smallest details of a matter; also the need for doing even little things as well as one could. From his father's personal example, he realised the need to oppose injustice, even at the risk of his life.

But if Mohandas feared and respected his father, he loved and worshipped his mother.

The outstanding impression Putlibai left on her son's mind was one of saintliness. She was very religious. Prayers, daily visits to the temples, observance of vows and fasts were common practices in her life. Gandhiji's whole life shows how deeply these things had influenced him and, indeed, become a part of it.



His great love for his mother did not mean that Mohandas obeyed her blindly in everything. Sometimes she made mistakes. To these love could not be blind. He would not give up a principle, even at a young age, at the bidding of a doting mother. Once he had complained to her of being beaten or ill-treated by his brother. Putlibai was angry and asked him why he did not hit back. Young Mohan was puzzled. "How can you teach me to hit people? Why should I hit anybody?" he protested, "should you not ask the one who hit not to do so, instead of asking the one who is hit to do the same?"

Putlibai wondered from where her son had got his strangely wise arguments.

When Mohandas had decided to go to England for legal studies, Putlibai was much disturbed. She had learnt that young people got lost there and took to meat and liquor.

"How can I trust you in a distant land?" she had asked, "I am dazed and do not know what to do. I will ask Becharji Swami."

Swamiji knew how to calm the mother's fears. He got Mohandas to take a vow—to keep away from meat, wine and women. These vows more than once kept Mohandas from falling a victim to temptations.

In later years, Gandhiji wrote : "It was not owing to my own strength, but owing to my unlettered mother. She bound her son by the thread of a vow and he was saved."

Putlibai died before Mohandas returned to India, after completing his legal studies. The news of her death had not been revealed to him when he was away in England for fear that he might break down. He learnt it on landing. His grief was great.

Shortly after, Mohandas went to Nasik and performed the purificatory ceremony which his caste required because he had gone overseas. He did this in fulfilment of his dear mother's dying wish.

Mohandas always used to address his mother as "thou",never as "you"..... He had feared that she might think her child was no longer close to her, and feel hurt!

Apart from imbibing her deeply religious nature, Gandhiji learnt several things from Putlibai. One was not to make differences between one's children and those of others. This impartiality and equal regard for all later became a feature of community life in Gandhiji's Ashrams. Putlibai's goodness and self-denial put Gandhiji in mind of the vastly greater love and mercy of God.

Gandhiji once mentioned that he owed the ceaseless growth of his moral and spiritual qualities to his devotion to parents. But the same devotion also laid the foundation of his intellectual growth.

2. ADHERENCE TO TRUTH

Truthfulness seemed to be inherent in Gandhiji. But the desire to be truthful at all costs had its origin, mainly, in a boyhood experience. This had left a deep and life-long impression on his mind.

A team of travelling actors had visited his home-town. They had put up the play of King Harishchandra of Ayodhya. Young Mohandas had gone to witness it.

In his adherence to Truth, Harishchandra goes through intense suffering. He has to part with his kingdom; his wife and son are sold as slaves. The boy dies of a snake bite. The climax is reached when Harishchandra, who has by now become an executioner, is required by law to put his crying wife to death. Harishchandra does not flinch in the performance of his duty. But just as he prepares for it, Sage Vishwamitra, who has put him through all this ordeal in order to test his truthfulness, intervenes. Harishchandra's claim to the title, "The Truthful," is recognised. All that he has lost is restored to him.

The fearlessness and determination of Harishchandra in putting up with all suffering in the course of following Truth profoundly touched young Mohandas' heart. It haunted him for long. Whenever he recalled Harishchandra's trial and tribulations he would weep. He acted and re-enacted Harishchandra's role in his own mind a number of times.

The question again and again presented itself to him: "Why should not all be truthful like Harishchandra?" To follow truth and to face all the hardships even as Harishchandra had done was the one ideal that inspired Mohandas.

It did not matter to him that Harishchandra might not have been a historical figure. The ideal was enough to challenge him to follow Truth.

In his own life, Gandhiji fearlessly bore ample witness to Truth. He declared: "I have no God to serve but Truth. God is Truth. I am devoted to none but Truth and I owe no discipline to anybody but Truth."

For his ceaseless pursuit of Truth, Gandhiji had to pay a heavy price: deep mental anguish, political persecution, physical hardship and the denial of personal liberty, time and again. But he persisted in his adherence to Truth in the face of tremendous odds. For he believed that, in the end, Truth would assert itself.

No wonder, Gandhiji's example in steadfast adherence to Truth has led the country to adopt as its motto:

Satyameva Jayate—Truth Will Ever Triumph.

3. FIRST LESSON IN AHIMSA

This happened, when Mohandas was about 15 years of age. The Gandhis were staunch Vaishnavites. Meat-eating was forbidden to them. An elder brother had run into debt for eating meat in secret. It was a small debt and had to be repaid. The brothers held counsel together. Mohan's brother had a gold armlet. It was decided to chip off a piece of it, sell it and settle the debt quietly. This was done. Their parents did not know it. Mohandas sensed he had done wrong. He resolved never to steal again.

That night the parents noticed that the crown of the armlet was missing. They asked the boys, but both denied knowledge of it. Such was the parent's implicit trust in their children that they believed them and let the matter drop.

But as Mohan worked at his lessons that night, his mind was ill at ease. Conflicting thoughts troubled him. He could not bear it any longer and opened his heart to his mother. She was deeply attached to him, and felt much concerned at her son's lapse. She advised him to go and make a clean breast of it to his father.

Mohandas agreed. But somehow he could not muster enough courage to face and speak to his father. He was not afraid, of being beaten. In fact, his father had never beaten any of them. But Mohandas was fearful of the pain that the discovery of his misdeed would cause him. His father had full confidence in

them. It would hurt him to learn that they had betrayed it. His father would be unhappy. Mohandas felt miserable at the thought. But there was no escape from it. The sense of shame and guilt was hanging heavy on his mind. The only way to shake it off was to admit his error. Only confession, coupled with a sincere resolve not to repeat the sin, could help to sweep his mind clean like a new broom.

So picking up courage Mohandas wrote out his confession on a piece of paper. In it he not only admitted his guilt but also asked for proper punishment for it. In deep pain, he asked : "So father, in your eyes your son is now no better than a common thief?" Lastly, he pledged his word never to repeat the wrong.

When Mohandas handed his note of confession, Kaba Gandhi was ill in bed, a plain wooden plank. He was suffering from fistula and was in much pain. But his physical pain was nothing compared to the anguish which his son's admission of sin caused him.



Having given the note to his father, Mohandas sat down at the foot of the bed. He trembled as he waited. But he was braced for what he feared was coming.

Kaba Gandhi was a man true and straight as steel. His son's straying from the right path did shock him beyond words. But there was no storm of anger, no rain of abuse, no harsh chiding even. The old man's brow was knit in sorrow; his eyes filled with tears. Mohandas was to describe it many years later : "Pearl-drops trickled down his cheeks, wetting the paper. For a moment, he closed his eyes in thought and then tore up the note. He had sat up to read it. He again lay down. I also cried. I could see my father's agony. These pearl drops of love cleansed my heart." His speaking the truth had melted his father's wrath. From that day telling the truth became a passion with Mohandas. He learnt of the purifying power of sincere penitence. He was later to see in it the nature of true *Ahimsa*. When such *Ahimsa* becomes all embracing, it changes everything it touches. There is no limit to its power.

To Mohandas it was his first lesson in *Ahimsa*.

4. THE DIFFICULTY OF BEING DISHONEST

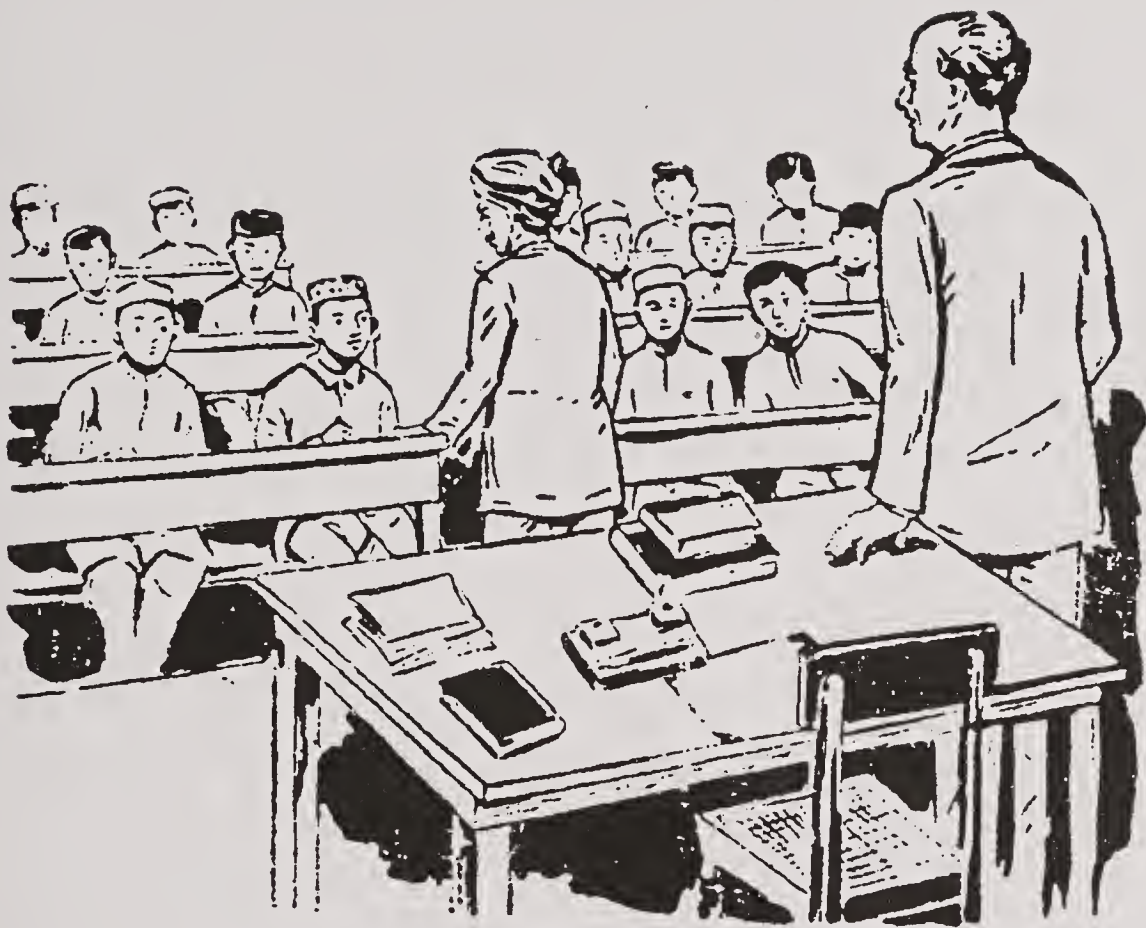
It was inspection day at Mohandas' school at Rajkot. Mr. Giles, the school inspector, was paying a visit to the school to see it at work. The children had been asked to come well-groomed and with their best clothes on. The teachers and the older boys had worked till late on the previous evening, giving the school a fresh look. Blackboards, desks, bookshelves and cupboards had been swept and dusted till they looked spick and span.

The headmaster of the High School had impressed on the teachers that, when Mr. Giles came, he should see the best boys on the front benches. It was very necessary that Mr. Giles should take with him a high opinion of both the teachers and the students. The size of next year's grant depended on the inspector's report to the Education Department.

When Mr. Giles arrived, the headmaster received him with due ceremony and took him round the classes, one by one. In due course, the inspector visited Mohandas' class. Mr. Giles set the boys a spelling test. He gave them five words in dictation. One of the words was "kettle".

Mohandas was confused. Was it "cattle" or "kettle"? The teacher saw his flurried face and found that he had misspelt the word. He prodded Mohandas with his foot. He wanted him to copy the correct spelling from his neighbour's slate.

But somehow it never occurred to Mohandas that his



teacher could want him to cheat. Was he not there to supervise against any such dishonesty? So Mohandas stuck to his spelling and the mistake remained uncorrected.

Every other boy had spelt all the words correctly. Only Mohandas had failed to do so—only because of his stupidity and refusal to copy ! After the inspector left, the teacher angrily tried to bring home to Mohandas his mistake and even more his foolishness. Mohandas was still unconvinced that his teacher had really wanted him to copy ! Copying was the one thing he could never learn.

Dishonesty was foreign to his nature.

In later life, too, Gandhiji used to say, what is gained through falsehood, through dishonest and crooked means, is but short lived. It would prove harmful in the end. Right from his

student days, Mohandas had realized the need for honesty in regard to money. He himself used to keep accounts. Accurate accounts had always to be kept, especially of public money.

Bapu has said : “There is no shorter way than the straightest way. Has not Euclid taught us that the straight line is the shortest distance between two points ?”

5. THE VANITY OF FASHION

Gandhiji's loin-cloth was famous and is now a matter of history. But once he had passed through his own phase of vanity.

When in England as a law student, the lure of "playing the gentleman" had cast a spell on Mohandas. He threw away his Bombay-made clothes and got himself rigged in those of the latest cut from the *Army and Navy Stores* in London. He spent as much as ten pounds on a single Bond Street suit. He learned to sport a double watch-chain of gold. He even acquired skill in putting on a necktie. He spent considerable time in parting his hair in the correct style of the day. He capped it all with a top hat. To do this he took a good hour or more daily before the mirror.

A gentleman is known not only by the cut of his clothes, but also by the manner of his speech, he believed. He must therefore have lessons in elocution. He started studying the book Bill's *Elocution* with especial care.

A taste for music is the hallmark of culture, young Mohandas thought. Why not learn some chamber music ? That was the beginning of the violin lessons.

In the midst of all this process of growing to be a gentleman a bell rang within him. Mohandas suddenly realized that he had gone to London for studying at the Bar, *not* for acquiring the make up of a dandy or the air of genteel folk. He had not

come to that city only to spend a lifetime. Time was running against him. What was the use of education? How would it make him a better lawyer.? Would dancing make a gentleman of him ? Violin he could learn at home in India. Here he was a student. Studies were his main job and he had to qualify himself for the Bar at the Inns of Court-not at a fashion parlour.

The truth came home to Mohandas.

“If my character made a gentleman of me, so much the better. Otherwise I should forego the ambition.”

Making up his mind to turn over a new leaf, Mohandas gave up dancing, elocution and music classes. He stopped living with an English family, where he had to keep up appearances. He rented rooms on his own account; and started being plain himself. He left off using the omnibus and the cab and saved on fares. Walking several miles a day helped him to save money as well as to improve health. He gave up dining out and started cooking his breakfast at home. His food bill dropped.

The spell of vanity and fashion was over. Plain living and simplicity took their place. “Simplicity is not so simple a thing as people imagine,” he had observed in later life, when he went about in a loin-cloth.

But the foundation of his simple way of life had been laid in the struggle of his student days.

6. FIRST STEP IN SELF-DENIAL

In 1901, Gandhiji decided to leave South Africa. For eight years he had lived and worked there for his countrymen. Now, he wanted to return home to India. His friends were pressing him to do so. He himself felt that he might be of greater service to the motherland.

Gandhiji's co-workers were reluctant to let him go back to India. They finally agreed, on condition that he would return to South Africa if they wanted him back at any time. He agreed.

The Natal Indians bade him an affectionate farewell. They held receptions and meetings galore, praised his services, and expressed their gratefulness. And they showered gifts on him.

Gandhiji came home in the evenings, loaded with addresses and garlands, and presents-consisting of gold studs, bangles, gold watches, brooches, chains and a necklace and even expensive jewels made of diamond.

Kasturba turned the presents over and over again. Her simple heart was overjoyed at the sight of so much gold-given with so much affection too. She beamed with pleasure.

But Gandhiji was silent, thoughtful and glum. A struggle was on in his mind. Had he a right to accept the gifts? He had claimed to serve the community - without reward. All the gifts-excepting a few from his legal clients - were purely for his public services. Even his clients had helped him in public

work. Would it be correct to receive expensive presents from them?

One of the gifts was a lovely gold necklace. It was worth at least 50 guineas. It was intended for Kasturba. True, but it was given to her because of *his* public work. So it could not be separated from the rest.

That night Gandhiji could not sleep a wink. He tossed restlessly in bed-for a long time. Then he got up, and started pacing up and down the room, his mind much disturbed. But there appeared to be no way out of his dilemma. He could not retain the presents. At the same time it was hard to give up so many beautiful and costly things.



Supposing he kept them. Would it be right? Would it be the correct example to his children? And then, what about Kasturba? They were all being groomed for public service without reward. He had taught them and they were beginning to learn that service was its own reward. If so, how could they keep and enjoy valuables given to him as a reward?

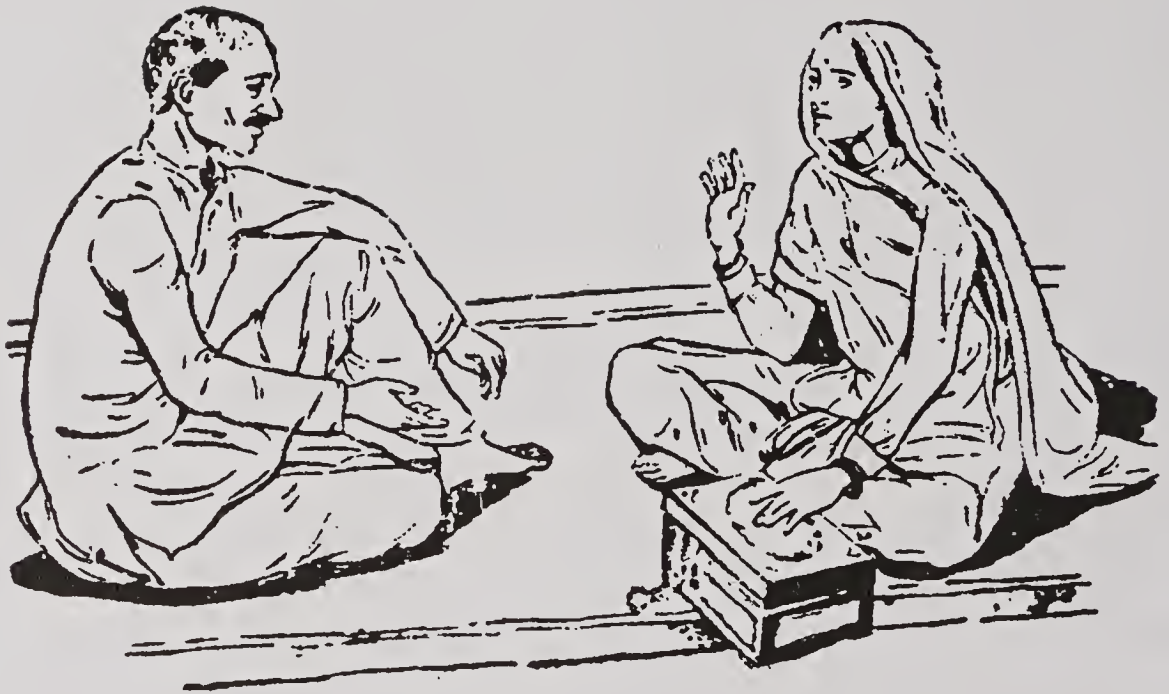
They had been simplifying their daily life, step by step. They had no costly ornaments of their own in the house. It was then hardly proper for them to wear or use gold watches and diamond rings given by others. Moreover, he had been publicly asking people to shed their love for gold. Would it be proper and would it not look ridiculous if they retained that lure for gold themselves ?

Gandhiji realized that they could not do so, that he could not let them do so—if he was to be true to himself. The right thing to do, he decided, would be to hand over all the presents to a public trust. Money could be raised as loans on it for public work when the need arose. Once Gandhiji resolved to do this, his mind was at peace. And he slept well.

A resolution is easy to make; not so easy to carry out. Gandhiji realized this next morning. He opened the topic with his sons. He thought, and in fact found, it easy to persuade them to adopt his course of action. He explained it to them and asked for their support when he proposed it to their mother.

“We do not need these costly presents”, Harilal and Manilal said. “Let us give them back to the community. In case we ever want them, we can easily buy them.” Having agreed to the proposals, they added, “We will persuade mother. She herself would not want to wear them. She perhaps likes to keep them for our sake. But if we tell her, ‘Mother dear, we do not need them, nor will our wives,’ she is sure to agree to part with them.”

It appeared so simple. Easier said than done. When Kasturba heard their plea, she turned to Gandhiji in anger and said sarcastically : “You may not need the jewels. Your children, too, whom you have converted. They would dance to your tune.



I can see that it is you who do not want them to keep the ornaments. But, pray tell me, what about my daughters-in-law?"

"Your daughters-in-law ?" Gandhiji said in some bewilderment. He had evidently not thought of them.

"Yes," continued Kasturba with determination. "Our daughters-in-law are sure to need them. And may I ask one thing? Is not gold a help during distress ? Who knows what difficulties we may have tomorrow? Moreover, these are gifts of love. Can you be so heartless as to return them ? And it would be quite bad manners to do so. I shall keep them."

She spoke as one who had made up her mind, and more, closed it to all further argument!

Gandhiji was not convinced and shook his head. When her arguments failed, Kasturba's tears flowed fast. The children were firm in their resolve. And Gandhiji was determined not to yield either to her arguments or to her tears. Yet he tried to coax her. He said : "The children are too young to be married. When they

are of age, they will take care of things.” “And, as for ourselves,” he added, “We will not accept for our sons brides who are greedy for gold! And even if you need to deck them with ornaments, I am, of course, there. You will ask me then.”

Kasturba was furious. “Ask you ?” She exclaimed scornfully. “Don’t I know you by this time? You who took away all my ornaments ! You would not let me live in peace wearing them! You who are trying to make sadhus of your sons even now! Fancy now your offering to get ornaments for your daughters-in-law ! No, I shall not return the ornaments. And pray, what right have you to take away the necklace they presented to me ?”

Gandhiji, wincing under this torrent of home-thrusts, managed to stammer back : “B-but the necklace-er-was given to you—er—in reward of my services, not yours ?”

Kasturba was not so easily cowed down.

“Yes, indeed, I agree. But am I not your wife ? Service rendered by you is as good as my own. And have I not toiled and moiled for you day and night ? Is that no service ? And should it go unrewarded ? And as if all that I do for you is not enough, you crowd the house with your friends and co-workers, and you force me to serve them too. Many a time I shed bitter tears over it. But mighty little did you care and I had to slave for them all the same!”

Kasturba’s words were sharp like darts and some of them did go home. Poor Gandhiji was hurt. But that did not shake off his resolve.

And by dint of effort, he wrung Kasturba’s consent—unwilling though it was. She knew by experience that once Gandhiji made up his mind, he was like a rock.

The jewels were all listed and deposited in a bank as a public trust. Loans could be raised on it in times of public need at the wish of Gandhiji or that of the trustees.

The fund was of great help in later years, the years of passive resistance. Gandhiji never regretted the step. Ba too saw in due course the wisdom of it. It saved them from many temptations.

Many years later, when Gandhiji had set up the Satyagraha Ashram at Sabarmati, he declared to the inmates: "I am convinced that we should not allow jewels in the Ashram. As long as there is terrible starvation in our land it is sin for us to keep or put on even a ring studded with gems."

While of silver or gold he wanted none for himself or for those who had cast their lot with him, he often begged for both in later years. But it was only for the uplift of the lowly and the lost.

7. MANILAL'S RECOVERY

Once Manilal, Gandhiji's eldest son, was very ill when ten years old and was staying in Bombay. The doctor prescribed him eggs and chicken broth. Medicine would do no good. Bapu said : "We are vegetarians. Manilal can't take eggs and broth. I can't give them. Will you not prescribe something else in their place ?"

The doctor shook his head. "Your son's life is in danger," he said, "Do not be hard on your son."

Gandhiji pleaded with him. "I shall try my hydropathy or water treatment on him. But I would like you to help me to examine his pulse, chest, lungs, etc. I shall be grateful to you."

The doctor agreed to this.

Gandhiji told Manilal what had passed between the doctor and him. Manilal said: "Do try your hydropathic treatment, father. I will not take eggs or chicken broth."

Gandhiji was glad to hear this, all the more because he knew Manilal would have readily taken eggs and broth if he had advised him to do so.

Manilal had high fever—104°. At night he was delirious. Gandhiji got anxious. If something went wrong, what would people say about him ? Could he not afford other doctors, or Ayurvedic pandits ? What right had he to try his fad on his son, or to risk his life ? Gandhiji was sorely disturbed. But he

said to himself: "God will surely be pleased to see me giving my son the same treatment that I would have given myself. The thread of Manilal's life is in God's hands. Why not trust in Him and in His name and go on with the water treatment ? I think it is right."

It was night. He was lying by Manilal's side, in the same bed. He decided to give him a wet sheet pack. He got up, wetted a sheet, wrung the water out of it and wrapped it about Manilal, keeping only his head out, then covered it with two blankets. He applied a wet towel to the head. The body was burning to the touch, like hot iron, and was quite dry and parched. There was no perspiration at all. Gandhiji was much tired. He left Manilal in Kasturba's charge and went out for a walk on the Chowpatty beach to refresh himself.

It was about 10 o'clock in the night. The beach was deserted. Plunged in deep thought, Gandhiji prayed to God : "My honour is in your keeping, O Lord, in this hour of trial," he repeated to himself. Ramanama was on his lips all the time. After a short time, his heart beating fast with worry and anxiety, Gandhiji returned home.

No sooner had he entered the room, than Manilal said : "Have you returned, Bapu ?"

"Yes, dear".

"Then do please pull me out. I am burning all over."

"Are you perspiring, my son?"

"I am simply wet to the skin. Do please take me out."

Gandhiji touched Manilal's forehead. It was covered with beads-of sweat. The temperature was going down. Gandhiji thanked God.



“Manilal, my child,” he said, “your fever is sure to go down now. A little more sweat and I shall take you out.”

“Pray Bapu,” Manilal pleaded. “Do free me from this furnace. Wrap me up some other time if you like. But just now, take me out.”

Gandhiji somehow managed to keep him under the pack for a few more minutes by diverting his mind, cracking jokes and even telling him a story. By this time, the perspiration streamed down his forehead. It was only then that Gandhiji undid the pack and mopped up the wet patches on his body. That done, he nestled close to his son. Soon, both of them fell asleep. They slept soundly.

Next morning, Manilal had much less fever. He continued like this for forty days living on diluted milk and fruit juices, and was then finally restored to health.

What was it that had helped Manilal's recovery? God's grace? Gandhiji's skill in hydropathy? His nursing or the dieting? For his part, Gandhiji believed that it was simply his faith in God. It was an endless faith, never deserting him in greatest distress or difficulty.

8. SERVING THE PLAGUE-STRICKEN

It was about the year 1904. The place was the old “Coolie” location in Johannesburg, South Africa. Indians were forced to live there. The location was very dirty and unhealthy. The Municipality did little or nothing to clean it up. Heavy rain for over a fortnight had made conditions worse.

Gandhiji feared that there might be an outbreak of black plague. His fears came true.

One afternoon he received a note from Madanjit, the publisher of Gandhiji’s weekly paper, *Indian Opinion*. The note brought alarming news. It said : “There has been a sudden attack of the black plague. You must come immediately and take prompt steps.”

Many Indians working in the mines were being brought out. Some of them were dead. Some others were dying. They all had the dreaded plague.

Gandhiji sent urgent word to the Municipal Medical Officer of Health. Also to the Town Clerk. But he did not wait for them to come. With an inspector, he rushed to the scene.

There was no hospital nearby. Nor was there time to take them to the hospital. With the help of Madanjit and some volunteers, Gandhiji broke open the lock of a vacant house. They got hold of some blankets and beds.

The community held a meeting and collected money. Shopkeepers gave some stores. A temporary hospital was set up. They carried the patients there. Dr. Godfrey, an Indian doctor, joined Gandhiji.



All through the night, Gandhiji, the doctor and the volunteers worked without rest or respite. They attended to the patients, fed and nursed them.

Next morning when the Municipal doctor visited the place, he found some 17 patients either dead or dying. With the permission of the doctor, Gandhiji had put three others under his “earth” treatment, applying wet bandages to their heads and chests. Two of them were saved. Those still alive were shifted to a plague camp, under the charge of Bapu and Dr. Godfrey.

By his quiet courage, Gandhiji had set an example to the others. They had served the plague-stricken in spite of great peril to themselves. Compassion had conquered fear of death. To Gandhiji it was no new experience. At home in Rajkot, many years before, he had done similar relief work during a plague epidemic.

9. JUSTICE TO INDENTURED LABOUR

One day Gandhiji was sitting in his law office at Johannesburg. He had started practice only three months earlier. Suddenly, the door opened and in came a man. His clothes were in tatters. His crumpled turban was on his head. He was bleeding from the mouth. Two of his front teeth were broken and hanging loose. He stood there—uncertain, trembling and weeping—a picture of misery.

The man removed his dirty head cloth and holding it in his hands, stood there, a picture of abject humility. Gandhiji did not know at first why he had removed his headgear. His Tamil clerk whispered to him : “It is a mark of respect, Sir. They must be bareheaded in the presence of their superiors.”

Gandhiji did not like this sense of inferiority. He made a sign to the man to put on his turban. He did so with wonderment rather unwillingly. He seemed to have been badly beaten up by his master. For he was an indentured labourer—another name for a virtual slave.

Gandhiji's clerk was a Tamilian. He saw the plight of the man and stepped forward to meet him. He questioned the poor fellow. His name was Balasundaram. He was under an indenture or contract of service to a well-known European resident of Durban. The master had got angry, lost his head and beaten Balasundaram black and blue, knocking out two of his teeth.



The first thing that Gandhiji did was to send him to a doctor—a white doctor. There were no Indian or coloured doctors in Johannesburg at that time. Gandhiji asked the doctor to give Balasundaram a certificate about the nature of his injuries. The doctor sent the certificate : the injuries appeared to have been caused through severe thrashing. Gandhiji then went with Balasundaram to a magistrate and gave a written statement to him. The magistrate read it, and was very angry at the white

man's brutal behaviour.

"The man who beat him up like this must be brought to book," he said. He promptly issued a summons to him.

Gandhiji did not, in fact, want Balasundaram's master to be punished. He only wanted to have Balasundaram relieved from his service. The poor fellow was badly bruised in body, and completely broken in spirit. He would never like to return to his master. Gandhiji understood him. He knew the law on indentured labour. It provided that if an *ordinary* servant left his master's service without giving notice, he was liable to be sued in a civil court by his master. But, in the case of the *indentured* labourer the law was different. The law provided for a harsher penalty : the man could be sued in a criminal court and sent to jail. Under that law the indentured labourer was no better than a slave. He was the property of his master, who could do what he liked with him. It was an inhuman system.

Balasundaram could be given relief in one of two ways. Either the Protector of Indentured Labour could cancel his indenture or contract and transfer him to another master—or, he could persuade the employer to release him.

Gandhiji thought the first course better. He went to his master and said : "I do not want to proceed against you and get you punished. I think you understand how cruelly you have beaten Balasundaram. Still, if you transfer his indenture to someone else, I shall be satisfied and will drop the matter."

The master, already feeling sorry for his conduct, readily agreed. Gandhiji went back to the Protector of Indentured Labour and told him what had happened. The latter agreed on condition that Gandhiji found a new employer for Balasundaram.

Gandhiji's work was not over. He went in search of a new place for the poor fellow. Though he knew only a few Europeans at the time, he succeeded in persuading one of them to take Balasundaram into his service.

Balasundaram's case brought joy and hope to many indentured labourers in Natal. They had now someone who championed their cause and would defend them against injustice. Gandhiji became their guardian.

Thereafter Gandhiji decided to become the poor indentured labourers' lawyer. In his eyes, to secure justice for the oppressed was the first duty of a lawyer.

Gandhiji worked hard in South Africa to bring relief to the indentured labourer and improve his service conditions. Once the term of indenture was over, Gandhiji wanted to win for him the status of a free citizen.

Back in India, he carried on a campaign to end the evil system of indenture. Many highminded individuals and some institutions supported him. Even Indian women joined the movement. Gandhiji said that if the system was not ended, there would be *satyagraha*. But, by July 1917, the Government of India had abolished the system.

10. THE HONEST COURSE

In South Africa Parsi Rustomji was Gandhiji's client and co-worker. Such was his confidence in Gandhiji that he sought and followed his advice even in private and domestic matters. Even when he was ill, he would seek Gandhiji's aid.

Once Parsi Rustomji got into difficulty. He was a large importer of goods from Bombay (now Mumbai) and Calcutta (now Kolkata). Often he resorted to smuggling. He was on the best terms with the customs officials. They did not suspect him. Some of them perhaps helped him.

Once Parsi Rustomji ran to Gandhiji tears rolling down his cheeks. He was in trouble. "Bhai, I have deceived you. My guilt has been found out today. I have smuggled and now I am doomed. I must go to jail and be ruined. You alone may be able to save me from this. I have kept back nothing from you except this thing about smuggling. But now, how much I repent it !

Gandhiji calmed him and said : "To save or not to save you is in God's hands. As for me, you know my way, I can but try to save you by means of confession."

The good Parsi felt deeply hurt. "But is not my confession before you enough ?" he asked.

"You have wronged not me but the Government," Gandhiji replied, "How will your confession before me avail you ?"

Parsi Rustomji said : "Of course, I will do just as you advise, but will you not consult with my old counsel. He is a friend, too."

Inquiry showed that the smuggling was going on for a long time. But so far the goods involved only a small sum. Gandhiji took Parsi Rustomji to his lawyer. He looked at the papers. He was gloomy, "You will be tried by a Natal Jury and are not likely to be acquitted. But I will not give up hope."

Gandhiji and Parsi Rustomji went back to his shop. Gandhiji opened his heart to Parsi Rustomji. "I don't think this case should be taken to court at all. It rests with the Customs



Officer to prosecute you or to let you go, and he in turn will have to be guided by the Government lawyer. I am prepared to meet both. I propose that you should pay the penalty they fix, and odds are that they will be agreeable. But if they are not, you must be prepared to go to jail. I am of opinion that the shame lies not so much in going to jail as in committing the offence. The deed of shame has already been done. You should regard jail as a penance. The real penance lies in resolving never to smuggle again."

Parsi Rustomji did not take all this advice in good spirit. It was a bitter pill to him. He was a brave man, but his courage failed him for the moment. His name and fame were at stake, and where would he be if the edifice he had built with such care and labour should go to pieces ?

"Well, I have told you," he said at last, "that I am entirely in your hands. You may do just as you like."

Gandhiji met the Customs Officer, put all facts of the case fearlessly before him and pleaded with him. He also offered to place all his books of account before him. He assured him that Parsj Rustomji was feeling very sorry for all that he had done.

The Customs Officer said : "I like the old Parsi, But I am sorry he has made a fool of himself. You know where my duty lies. I must be guided by the Attorney-General. So I would advise you to use all your persuasion with him."

But Gandhiji got a promise from the Customs Officer that he will not drag Parsi Rustomji to court. He next wrote to and met the Attorney-General. He appreciated Bapu's frankness and, believed he had kept nothing from him. The case was compromised. Parsi Rustomji had to pay as fine double the

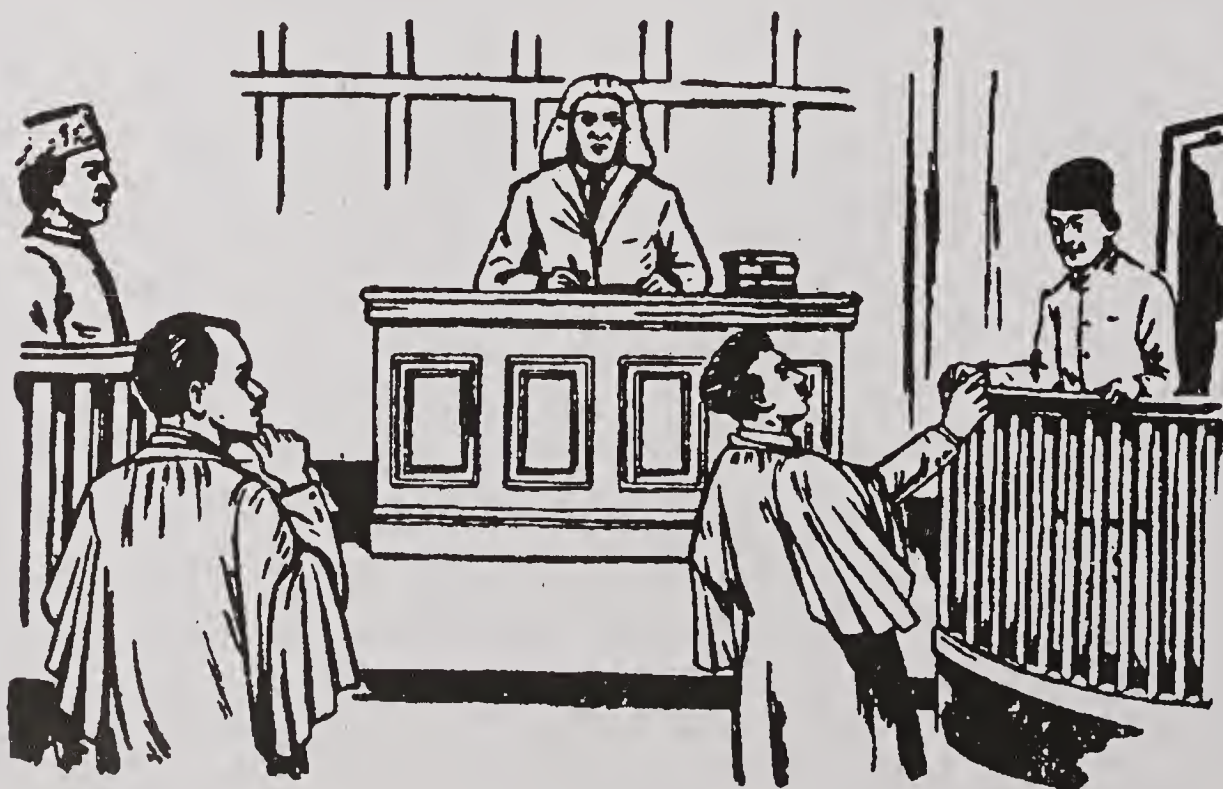
amount involved in the smuggling. He paid it. More, he wrote down all the facts of the case and framed and hung up the paper in his office. It was to serve as a constant warning to his heirs and fellow-merchants.

11. THE PRACTICE OF LAW

Gandhiji had heard, when a boy, that the lawyer's profession was a liar's profession. But this did not affect him, for he had no desire to earn either money or position by lying.

When he became a lawyer and practised in South Africa, his principle never to lie *was* put to the test many times. Often he knew that the lawyers on the opposite side had tutored their witnesses, but he would not tutor his own to tell lies to win his case.

In his heart of hearts he always wished that he should win only if his client's case was right. He never fixed his fees on the basis of the results of the case.



He warned every new client at the outset that he should not expect him to take up a false case or put up false witnesses.

On one occasion, Gandhiji was conducting a case before a magistrate in Johannesburg. He found that his client had deceived him. He saw him completely break down in the witness box. So without any argument, he asked the Magistrate to dismiss the case. He rebuked the client for bringing a false case to him. The opposing counsel was astonished; the magistrate was pleased.

Gandhiji's devotion to truth brought him fame. Only honest clients went to him. In spite of his being an Indian, white lawyers gave him their affection.

Gandhiji's object in practising in South Africa was the service of the community.

12. SELF-HELP

Gandhiji believed in self-help. When a student in England, he used to cook his own breakfast.

In South Africa, Gandhiji wanted to live a life of simplicity. “He realised that in order to cut down on expenses, he ought to do a number of things himself. First he decided to be his own dhoby. He bought a washing outfit and a book on washing. He studied the art and taught it to Kasturba. Once his collar was starched so much and ironed so little that it peeled off by bits much to the amusement of his lawyer friends. When they



asked him why he washed his own clothes, he said, "The laundry bill is very heavy. The charge for washing a collar is almost as much as its price; and even then you depend all the time on the washerman. I prefer by far to wash my clothes myself." His friends did not appreciate the beauty of self-help. But by dint of practice he became a good washerman.

Gandhiji, similarly became his own barber. It was in this way. Once a white barber in Pretoria refused to cut his hair. Gandhiji felt very hurt, immediately purchased a pair of clippers and cut his own hair. He managed the hair in the front somehow, but spoiled that at the back. His friends in the court rocked with laughter at the miserable result of his self-barbering. He told them he had decided to be his own barber as the white barbers would not touch black customers.

The seed of self-help was sown in Gandhiji at a very-early age. It took root, sprouted into a flower and bore rich fruit in later life.

13. DIGNITY OF LABOUR

Gandhiji made himself one with the lowliest of workers. This was not only in word, which was easy enough, but even more in deed.

“Mine is a life of joy in the midst of incessant work,” he used to say.

He was always the servant, the server, in the forefront of servants. He was true to the Biblical saying : “He that humbleth himself shall be exalted.”

In South Africa, at Phoenix or at Tolstoy Farm, dinners and receptions would be given from time to time to important visitors. At such parties, Gandhiji was never in the front row or near the guest of honour.

He did manual work, helped in the kitchen and waited on the guests. He was at home with the least, the humblest and the lowliest among them.

When Gopal Krishna Gokhale visited South Africa, Gandhiji ironed his favourite scarf. Gokhale had doubted if he could do it; but when he saw how well Gandhiji had done the job, he was pleased and gave him a certificate as an expert dhoby.

Gokhale could not take starchy or fatty food. Gandhiji himself roasted or charred bread and potatoes in the kitchen for him so that much of the starch was removed.

Gandhiji was fairly good at shoe-making; when, in one of the South African jails, he had made a pair of sandals for General Smuts. In prison he had practised the profession of a barber, too, he once told a group of Indian barbers.

When Gandhiji was in India, in 1901, he attended the session of the Indian National Congress at Calcutta (now Kolkata). He went to one of the Congress secretaries, Ghoshal, and asked for some work. He said: "I can give you only clerical work. Will you do it?"

"Certainly," replied Gandhiji, "I am here to do anything that is not beyond my capacity."

Ghoshal Babu gave him a heap of letters to sort out and look through. He was to separate the letters which needed consideration. Gandhiji was glad that he was entrusted with this work. He did it in no time.

Ghoshal Babu used to get his shirt buttoned by his bearer. "You see, now," he said to Gandhiji, "the Congress Secretary has no time even to button his shirt. He has always some work to do."

Gandhiji offered to do the bearer's duty and buttoned Ghoshal Babu's shirt.

In his own Ashram at Sabarmati, Gandhiji set an example in doing the meanest of jobs. Like other inmates he used to grind corn and draw water from the wells.

Even cleaning of latrines was not too low for him. When anyone did scavenging merely for money, it was no *yajna* or service, he used to say. But when one did it in a spirit of service, it had a value of its own.

"There is nothing demeaning or shameful about a profes-



sion,” he said, “Have I not cleaned lavatories ? There is no disgrace in doing so. On the contrary, it amounts to great service.” A mother becomes worthy of being remembered every morning, if she does no more than clean the child’s filth. Why should we not regard a *bhangi* in the same way, Gandhiji used to ask.

Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan has told how Gandhiji did not hesitate to do scavenging work when the need arose. Once it was reported to Gandhiji that the *bhangi* at Sevagram had run away. “Let us go,” Bapu had said, “Pick up broom and bucket and clean the place.” And he led a batch of volunteers including Khan Sahib and cleaned the latrines.

Bapu believed that no work that is done in God’s name and is dedicated to His service is small.

There is humility and joy in all body labour. All such labour has a dignity of its own.

14. BHANUBAPA'S SHOES

At Sevagram, Bhanubapa, a poor old man, clad in rags, had joined Gandhiji's camp. He worked hard the whole day long. He did the meanest jobs such as cleaning rubbish and refuse. He had only one meal a day. In spite of his old age, he was healthy, his teeth were firm and strong. Only when he had done his day's work was he happy. Sunshine or rain, he went about his duties, which were like those of a sanitary inspector. Even during rains he wore no more than his torn clothes. It did not seem to affect him at all.

One day, he said he needed a pair of shoes. He did not need them while working during daytime. But when he had to go out during the night or in the rain, he could not go barefoot. He had therefore made for himself a rough pair of shoes, by stitching together waste pieces of soft cardboard. But the shoes did not last more than one day of heavy downpour.

He asked Bapu : "Bapu, can you spare me a pair of wornout shoes ?"

"But why a wornout pair ?" Bapu asked. "Why do I need a new pair ? If I can live on leavings of food, I can as well wear old shoes." Bhanubapa replied, with his naive smile.

"But supposing I get a new pair made for you?" "Mercy on me! I do not like these modern sandals or slippers. I want

my old *Okhai* shoes with the outside stitch.” “Certainly, we can have them made in our tannery shop at Nalwadi.”

“But how will they be able to make this strange sort of shoes? Shall I go to Nalwadi and show them how to do it? But how can I leave my work even for a day?”

Bapu smiled.

“You need not leave your work nor need the shoemaker be called here. Give me that cardboard. I shall design the shoe and we shall ask our shoemaker to make them.”

Saying this, to the utter amazement of Bhanubapa, Bapu set to work on the design. He recalled the old *Okhai* shoe design which he had not seen for over thirty years. In a few minutes, he produced a dummy shoe. The pair of shoes was prepared from Bapu’s design.

It was a happy sight to watch Bhanubapa going about his daily work, in his tattered loin cloth and a new pair of *Okhai* shoes.

15. GOSPEL OF WORK

Bapu believed in working with one's own hands. There was nothing low or mean about it. Labour had a dignity all its own.

Once a visitor to the Ashram had asked him : "Bapu, are you not putting undue value on the gospel of work? Are you not making a fetish of it?" Bapu replied :

"Not at all. I have always meant what I have said. There can never be too much emphasis placed on work. I am simply repeating the gospel taught by the *Bhagavad Gita*. The Lord says: 'If I did not remain ever at work sleeplessly, I should set a wrong example to mankind.' That is why I appealed even to the professional men to spin on the charkha. That would set an example to the rest of our countrymen." The visitor was thoughtful for a moment. Then he asked: "Would you do the same thing with Lord Buddha, for example, if you met him?"

"Yes, without the slightest hesitation," Bapu replied. "Then, what would you say about great saints like Tukaram and Namdev?" "Who am I to judge them?" The visitor was puzzled. "But you would judge Buddha?"

"I never said so," Bapu replied. "I simply said, if I had the good fortune to be face to face with one like him, I should not hesitate to ask him why he did not teach the gospel of work instead of the gospel of contemplation or thought. I should do the same thing if I were to meet these saints."

16. "SUFFER LITTLE CHILDREN TO COME UNTO ME..."

Bapu loved children. "Children are my life. Let them come to me," he used to say. With a smiling face he would play and frolick with them. And children had a special charm for him. In fact they enjoyed each other's company.

Sarojini Naidu once wrote of Bapu :

"This habit of mirth draws children to him naturally, inevitably. He delights in their company, as he delights... in birds, flowers, animals, the whole of nature."

Many are the anecdotes and stories of Bapu's love for children. It had the quality of a mother's love in it.

From his earliest days "Bapu liked to look after and fondle children. For example, in his Phoenix Settlement in South Africa, he would take in his arms the little babies of the inmates one by one and nurse them. At such moments, a smile would light up his face and make it beautiful, and a tender gleam would shine in his eyes.

The children would claim his attention by turns. He would show his love to all freely. Among the children, a pale and ailing Muslim boy, Kasim, claimed and obtained most love from him. All through the evening, the little one sat upon his knees and Bapu would tenderly stoop to ask him whether he was in pain.

Next time it was a small Zulu girl from the Mission who

became the centre of Bapu's attention and concern. Deenabandhu Andrews has described how, in the silence of the evening, Bapu



sang a religious song and a prayer to God to bless all mankind. "There in Africa, I had found Christ ... I could almost picture Christ moving about in the Ashram, sitting with us at our evening meal and joining us in the worship of the Father of all mankind.

Henry Polak, another associate and fellow worker of Bapu in South Africa, had recalled another incident. It shows Bapu's motherliness in the case of the guest of a European couple, friends

of Polak. They had a little baby which would cry all night. Bapu had just come out of prison. He had a very hard time and was now much in need of rest. He saw that his host had spent a sleepless night. The next night, after his friends had gone to bed, Bapu quietly entered the room, took the child in his arms and dragging his cot into his own room, put him to sleep, attending to his needs throughout the night.

Bapu never liked to treat children differently because they were European, Indian or African. Once in Durban, he had seen a mayor's procession in which children had participated. He saw not a single African or coloured child. He took objection to this. Was it a punishment to the children, he asked, for the "sin" of being born of coloured parents ? Would the South Africans change Christ's words "Suffer little children to come unto me ?"

17. A CHILD AMONG CHILDREN

Bapu knew how to win over children. His formula was simple: be a child among children. There was nothing artificial or crude about this; it came naturally to Bapu. He was almost a child at heart, responding readily to goodness and beauty in man and nature.

At Tolstoy Farm, in South Africa, Bapu saw that the boys and girls had the lion's share of farm work digging pits, felling timber and lifting loads. This gave them ample exercise. Besides, the children loved to do such work. They took pride in it. But it was not *all* work for them. Bapu would spend some time every day playing with them. And he would tell the younger ones stories.

He knew that children learn much more, and with less labour, through their ears than through their eyes. He therefore used story-telling to reach their heads and hearts. Once he said of a little child in the Ashram at Sabarmati, "Little Kana, by insisting on making me tell him stories, is making me an expert in the art. For you know, story-telling is an art. It is a marvellous way of imparting all kinds of knowledge to children."

Bapu has recalled an experience which shows what a hold story-telling had on the minds of children. Once he had been to Santiniketan, little Namdini Bala, living there, became sulky and peevish and would not accept a garland of flowers from him. For she found that some of the time Bapu would use for telling her stories had been taken up in talking to poet Tagore ! "Who

knows,” Bapu wrote, “that she may be avenging herself because I was talking to Gurudev during her story time ? How can one get to the bottom of a child’s displeasure or a king’s ? If a king goes into a huff, a satyagrahi like me knows how to deal with him. But before a child’s petulance my brilliant weapon loses its lustre. Moreover, silence day intervened. And so I have to leave Santiniketan without winning Nandini over. To whom can I tell this sad story of my failure ?”

Bapu used to feel sorry that he could never give enough time to the Ashram children, to know each one of them by name, to play with them and to win their friendship and confidence. And whenever he was in jail he used to write letters to every one of them, answering the many points they used to raise in their own little notes to him.

Bapu was in the habit of getting all manner of work from the children, his “vanar sena”, as he used to call them. They were like Lord Sri Rama’s monkey army which helped to bridge the sea to Lanka. And Bapu knew the tricks to employ for putting children to work. For example he got a group of them paste up and dispatch copies of his Green Pamphlet at Rajkot in 1896, after he had “bribed” them with used postage stamps of African countries.

At all his public meetings, whenever children were present, he marked them for special attention. He would present to them fruits which people brought for him. Flowers that were used to garland him soon found themselves around the necks of tiny tots on the dais. Once in a public meeting in Ceylon (now Sri Lanka), he put the garland round the neck of a little pretty and bashful girl on the platform calling her his “little sweetheart!”

Bapu set great store on children: they were the wealth of the nation. And in the nation’s struggle for freedom was he not happy

and proud that little boys and girls took part in the *prabhat pheris*, singing patriotic songs, attending flag salutations, even braving lathi charges ? And he used to say : “How could these innocent ones who gave up their toys, their kites and their crackers, join as soldiers of swaraj ? That was only because our freedom fight was a nonviolent one.”

And many are the stories told of how little children, under the magic spell of Bapu, parted with their gold and silver trinkets and jewels when he begged for them for the sake of the poor Harijans.

Bapu believed that if we want to build a better world, we have to begin with the tiny folk of today who would one day rule it. “If we are to reach real peace in this world,” he once said, “and if we are to carry on a real war against war, we shall have to begin with children. And if they will grow up in their natural innocence, we won’t have to struggle, we won’t have to pass fruitless idle resolutions. But we shall go from love to love and peace to peace, until all the corners of the world are covered with that peace and love for which consciously or unconsciously the world is hungering.”

It was with this magic wand of love that Bapu drew little children unto him, for he was truly a child among children.

18. AMONG THE CHILDREN OF EAST END

Bapu went to England in 1931, to plead for India's freedom at the Round Table Conference. He preferred to stay at Kingsley Hall, in the midst of the poor workers of East End in London.

The workers were in a flurry : who should be the first to greet Bapu on his arrival at Kingsley Hall ? Which of the little boys or girls should welcome him?

One girl had something to say in the matter : "Oh, do choose our little Frankie", she said enthusiastically, "He talks about Gandhi all day long. The other night he dreamed about him and woke up saying, "Where's Mr. Gandhi ?" "

So when Bapu came, little Frankie had the honour of welcoming him on behalf of his little friends. Bapu had said : "If the gates of the heart are open, everything can get into it," The children of East End had kept their hearts wide open for him.

The little ones gathered round him now and then, and had a chat with him whenever he was free. In their midst Bapu felt as much at home, he said, as among the Ashram children back in India. They put to him 'all manner of questions, some simple, some puzzling, some even penetrating. In his answers to them, Bapu spread his message of truth and love.

"What is your language, Mr. Gandhi ?" asked one. Bapu in his reply took them through the sources of common words in English and in Indian languages. He wanted to show them

that the languages were after all, children of the same father. One boy was so much struck by the similarity of the words that he said : "It shows how we are all of the same breed." There was laughter at this, and Bapu said : "Then we are all one family and ought to be friends."

The little ones plied Bapu with questions about the weather in India and the games which the Indian children loved to play.

Another boy asked him why he wore the sort of clothes he did and also why he lived among them in East End. Bapu told him why. The same question had been earlier put to him by a newspaper reporter and he had replied : "I love the East End, particularly the little urchins in the streets. They give me friendly greetings."

Bapu wanted to sound them on nonviolence. He asked them if any of the boys hit back when hit by someone of them. A dozen hands shot up. Bapu had then a chance to give them a simple lesson on the principle of nonviolence. Perhaps he told them a story of his own childhood. He had once climbed a fruit tree in his father's garden and his elder brother had pulled him down by the leg. When he cried and complained of this to his mother, she advised him to give it back to his brother. Taken aback by this tit-for-tat counsel, he protested to his mother : "Should you not, Mother, prevent my brother from illtreating me instead of asking me to do likewise?" In this context, he asked the East End boys : "What should have been really done?" "Make friends with him," they replied.

Bapu indeed felt completely one with them. To be surrounded by the happy children was a treat for him; he did not feel at all a stranger in their midst.

And how did the children react to Bapu in their midst ? They



wrote a number of essays on him. This is what one girl below ten years of age wrote of “Uncle Gandhi” :

“St. Francis of Assisi was called the little poor man of Assisi. He was just like Gandhi in every way. They both loved nature, such as the children, birds and flowers. Gandhi wears loin-clothes like St. Francis did when he was on earth.

“Gandhi and St. Francis were sons of rich merchants. One night while St. Francis was feasting with his followers, he thought of the poor Italians. He ran out and gave up his rich clothes and his money to the poor and dressed himself in old sacks, just like Gandhi.

“St. Francis of Assisi took some of his followers. They made huts of trees. Gandhi did the very same thing. He gave up all his rich gay life to the poor Indian people. Gandhi’s people gave him the loin-clothes to come to London. As he told us children who go to Kingsley Hall that he was not rich enough to buy them.

“On Monday he has a day’s silence for that is their religion. Gandhi for his birthday presents had wooden toys, candles and sweets. He lives on goat’s milk, nuts and also fruits.”

And this is what a boy of ten wrote in his essay :

“Mr. Gandhi is an Indian who was educated as a law student in London in 1890. He gave up this to help his country get better conditions.

“He has come to England for the Indian Round Table Conference to try and get back the trade for India. He has been trying to get the ‘Brahmins’ to let the ‘Untouchables’ come into their temples.

“They are about 6,000,000 people who do not know what a good meal is. He has given up all his belongings and trying to be one of the poorest Indians. That is why he wears the loin-cloth.

“His food is goat’s milk, fruits and vegetables. He does not eat meat or fish because he does not believe in taking life. Gandhi is a Christian Indian.”

“Mr. Gandhi spins his own cotton. He does an hour’s spinning every day in England and even when he was in hospital. He has just come back from Lancashire visiting the cotton mills.”

“He prays from Sunday 7 p.m. till Monday 7 p.m. and if you speak to him he does not answer you. When he came visiting,

he came to my house and my mother was ironing but he said, Don't stop for I have had to do that myself. I have shaken hands with him. The Indian word for 'Hullo' or 'Goodbye' is 'Namaskar'."

During his stay, Bapu visited the Children's House, an East End clinic and nursery. What he saw greatly impressed him. He said : "It is an experience which will abide with me for life."

Bapu was glad to meet the children in their homes and at places of public meeting. At one such meeting, some of the children decided to send to him a small deputation carrying a message of friendship to the children of India.

But an even more touching incident took place on Bapu's birthday in England. The East End children put together their small pocket money and bought him some tiny presents. When the time for return home to India came and he got into the train at Victoria, on way to Southampton, he turned anxiously to Muriel Lester, his hostess, and asked : "Are the toys all right?" He was thinking of the little woolly animals, coloured candles and chalk drawings which the nursery children in Bow had given him as gifts. "These are the only things I am taking back to India," he said, "excepting what I came with."

There was a sequel to this. Soon after Bapu returned to India, he was arrested and imprisoned at Yeravada. From there he wrote a long-delayed letter to the children of Bow :

"I often think of you and the bright answers you gave to my questions when that afternoon we sat together. I never got the time when I was at Kingsley Hall to send you a note thanking you for the gifts of love you had sent me. I had hoped to transfer these gifts to the Ashram children about whom

you should ask Aunty Muriel to tell you something. But I was never able to reach the Ashram. Is it not funny that you should receive a letter from a prison ?



But though inside a prison I do not feel like being a prisoner. I am not conscious of having done anything wrong.

My love to you all.”

Yours
whom you call uncle

GANDHI

19. "MY DEAR CHILD..."

Bapu was a great writer of letters and hundreds of them were written to little children. Whether the child was in the Ashram or outside, in India or abroad, he always replied to little epistles from them. No child who wrote to him was ever disappointed.

There were many children in the Ashram : Indu, Sharada, Madhavlal, Mangala, Anand, Jekor, Pushpa, Mohan and Vanamala and many others. And he could not find it easy to write to each one of them, especially when he was travelling all over the country. When he was in jail, however, he used to find time for writing to them, but often he would write a joint letter to them, sometimes separate ones.



Once, when he was in Yeravada Prison, he wrote; "Ordinary birds cannot fly without wings. With wings, of course, all can fly. But, if you, without wings will learn how to fly, then all your troubles will indeed be at an end. And I will teach you. See, I have no wings, yet I come flying to you every day in thought. Look, here is little Vanamala, here is Hari, and here Dharma Kumar. You also can come flying to me in thought. There is no need of a teacher for those who know how to think. The teacher may guide us, but he cannot give us the power of thinking. That is latent in us. Those who are wise get wise thoughts."

Bapu of course knew what to write to every child who wrote to him. To one child he would write : "Improve your handwriting, there should be no spots." To another he would advise: "Keep a diary, it will help you to put down your thoughts and deeds in neat order." To a child who had complained to him of insects during the rainy season, he would write : "Innumerable insects are born during the rains. You should not collect the snails. Such insects are the creation of God. We do not know the use of them at all."

To Shamal who had asked about God, he wrote : "The best way to worship God is to see Him in all and so we should lovingly do service to all."

He could not always write long letters to the young children and sometimes they would be sore with him for it. For example, one wrote to Bapu : "Bapuji, you always tell us about the Gita. In the Gita, Arjuna asks just one question and Bhagwan Krishna rolls out a whole chapter in reply. But you answer our fullpage questions with just a word or a sentence. Is it fair ?" To him Bapu replied : "Well, Bhagwan Krishna had only one Arjuna to deal with, while I have a host

of Arjunas on my hands, and each of them is a handful. Don't I deserve sympathy?" And the little children laughed.

And Bapu was closely interested in each child who wrote to him and in what he wrote. He would speak of his own experience too. For example, he once wrote from Yeravada Prison:

"Your attempt to write a letter to me was very good. And what a reindeer you have sent! What lovely horns! I am sorry I am not playing with the goats, though they are brought before me every day to be milked. I don't play because when they come, I am always doing something which I must not give up. Yes, there are a few flowers but nothing much to speak of. The ground is stony and they can't afford in prisons to lay out gardens."

At another time, the same child had written to him of her fun with birds. And he replied :

"I see you are making friends with birds. We have made friends with a cat and her kittens. I call her 'sister'. It is delightful to watch her love for her young ones. She teaches them all sorts of things by simply doing them."

To one child he could write with childish interest : "I have preserved for you and Durgi pieces of coloured paper."

To another he could write mixing the light with the serious in his own unique way:

"I was delighted to have your sweet notes with the funny drawings made by you. You do not mind my sending one note for all of you. After all you are all one in mind though not in body. Yes, it is little children like you who will stop war. This means that you never quarrel with other boys and girls or among

yourselves. You can't stop big wars if you carry on little wars yourselves."

To parents who wrote to him about their children, Bapu was equally attentive and courteous : to one mother, he wrote:

"If a child does not take milk, how can it do ? Milk alone should be taken when you are hungry and then you will get to like it." To another mother upset with naughty children, he wrote:

"If children are stupid, remove stupidity with love, not by anger."

To a third mother who had sought his advice about toys :

"The idea of giving children dolls of different races was very good."

20. KINDNESS TO LIVING THINGS

Bapu has said :

“I believe all life is one.... Our dominion over the lower order of creation is not for their slaughter, but for their benefit equally with ours. For I am as certain that they are endowed with a soul as that I have.”



Take the cow, for instance. Bapu called it a poem of pity. It represented, in his eyes, the entire subhuman world. The farmers depended on cattle for many things. That

was why the cow was sacred to all Hindus. It was wrong to practise any form of cruelty on the cow and on the rest of the animal world.

Bapu could not bear any ill-treatment of the cow. He had stopped drinking cow's milk because, in the process of milking it to the last drop, much physical cruelty was often caused to it. Bapu was against cowslaughter. It was wrong from more than one point of view. But the best way of stopping the slaughter was to look after the cow well. Religion told us how to tend even weak animals.

Bapu could not justify killing, especially of harmless animals. He has said : "I would not kill a human being for protecting a cow, as I will not kill a cow for saving a human life be it ever so precious."

He was opposed to the use of animals for tests involving pain, mutilation and death in the name of experiments in medical science. The young Bapu had wanted to be a doctor but he gave up the idea because he had no heart to dissect frogs and other animals.

Bapu intensely yearned to serve the animal world. Man can explain his suffering, and can even try to free himself from it, he said. Animals cannot do this. It is the highest religion to end cruelty to animals.

Bapu believed that his service of human beings included service of animals. Such service was not opposed to the welfare of the animal world.

21. ALL LIFE IS ONE

Bapu was fond of plants even from childhood. There was no garden plot attached to the house. So he collected a number of plants in pots and put them on the roof. But when the family moved to Rajkot, he had a little garden of his own in the outer yard.

He would go to the garden in the evening, after returning home from school, dig there and tend the plants. He awoke at crack of dawn, went to the garden on the outskirts of the town with a group of boys, washed his clothes at the tank, and on his way back, always took a few saplings to plant in his own garden. He picked up a good deal of knowledge about plants and flowers. He even advised friends in the care of plants.

The love Bapu had for plants and trees stuck to him till late in life.

One night it was getting time for Bapu to go to bed. But he desired to card some cotton and make slivers for the next day's spinning before resting for the night. Miraben wanted to put the bow right. She asked an Ashram volunteer to fetch her some *babul* leaves for applying to the gut of the carding bow.

The volunteer broke off a whole branch from a nearby tree and brought her the bunch of leaves. Miraben looked at them and saw that the tiny leaves had tightly folded up. She went to Bapu's room and showing them to him, said, "Do see, Bapu, how the little leaves have curled up in sleep!"

“Of course,” said Bapu, looking at the tiny leaves in anger and pity. “Trees are living beings just like ourselves.

They live and breathe, they feed and drink as we do, and like us they need sleep. The tree rests at night. It is a bad thing to go and tear off its leaves then. Again, why have you plucked off such a huge quantity? Only a few would have been enough. Surely you have heard what I said at the meeting yesterday. I spoke of the poor flowers and how deeply it pains me that people should pluck masses of delicate blossoms and fling them on my face, or make a garland of them and hang it round my neck.”

Miraben nodded. She remembered Gandhiji’s speaking against the practice. He had said he could be happy if instead of flowers, people offered him garlands of handspun yarn.

“Was it not thoughtless of you to send the volunteer at this late hour of the night to fetch leaves? He only caused worry and pain to the tree when it had folded up its tender leaves for sleep. We should feel a more living bond between ourselves and the rest of nature.”

“Yes, Bapu, I understand,” Miraben replied in a low voice, hanging her head in shame. “It was very thoughtless of me. In future I will go myself to fetch the leaves. Also, I will endeavour never again, to needlessly disturb the peaceful sleep of the trees by plucking their leaves after darkness has set in.”

Miraben wrote down the incident later. On seeing it, Bapu commented : “Let no reader call this sentimental twaddle. Let him not accuse me or Miraben of hopeless inconsistency in that. We swallow a camel when we eat vegetables by the cartload, and strain at a gnat because we would not care to pluck a leaf from a tree having its night’s rest. Even a butcher may be humane to a certain extent. He does not slaughter a herd of sheep when

they are asleep. The essence of manliness lies in showing the utmost consideration to all life, animal as well as vegetable. He, who in search of pleasure shows little consideration for others, is surely less than a man. He is thoughtless.”

22. NURSING THE SICK

“What can be better than attending on the sick?”, Bapu had once written in a letter to his son, Manilal. “A greater part of one’s religion is contained in that.”

This was not a mere idea or a pious thought with Bapu. Ideas and thoughts had no value for him unless reduced to practice. His companions had known that, from his early years in South Africa, Bapu had a deep interest in nursing the sick.



Once, while attending to two sick persons in a room, an American missionary had asked him what his religion was. Bapu had pointed to the patients and said : “To serve the ailing is my religion.”

To help in the healing of a sick bod—his own or another's—was a matter of concern to him.

Often when Bapu visited a patient, he would not ask what was wrong with him, or how he had fallen ill. He would chat with him in good humour. When he left, the patient would feel greatly cheered up.

Bapu delighted in treating patients. Such was his interest in them that he would visit them morning and evening. He would let no one keep him away for long from a sick bed. The moment he was free, he would run to their bedside. He looked after them as if they were infants to be nursed by no one but him.

It was faith and strength of spirit that would keep the sick cheerful. In his Ashram at Sabarmati, there was a permanent invalid. He would often be down with asthma. But his face would show great calmness, such was his faith. There was another, a woman. She had a low fever most of the time. But, looking at her face, no one could say that she was suffering from a long and serious illness. The reason for this cheerfulness, again, was her faith. Bapu was all praise for such faith.

Bapu believed that even a patient could be of service to others. He could think of God. He could create an atmosphere of love all around him. For this he would need to curb his anger. He should not be impatient with those who attended on him.

Bapu knew of one such patient in France, an eighteen year old girl. Her illness was grave and she finally died. But she behaved with such love towards others during her last days that after her death she was canonized for her saintly goodness.

23. AMONG THE LEPERS

Bapu had a special concern for the lepers. It was a life-long one.

Once, many years ago, in South Africa, Bapu was going round the small Indian colonies on the outskirts of towns. His co-workers and he were out enrolling members to the newly-founded Natal Indian Congress and collecting funds for it.

Between two such Indian quarters, Bapu had to pass through a thickly-wooded region. While walking through it, Bapu saw some human figures in the distance. They were flitting behind the trees. Perhaps they were trying to catch a glimpse of him.

Bapu turned to his companions and asked : “Who are these people? What are they doing here? They seem to be our own folk?”

His companions looked at one another in silence. Some of them were familiar with the area. But they were puzzled. One of them finally said : “Bhai, they are our people alright. But they are stricken with leprosy and are forced to live outside the limits of the town.” Another said : “Bhai, they must have heard that you were due to pass this way and were eager to see you.” A third said : “Come, bhai, it’s not good to tarry here. They are most of them in an advanced and dangerous stage of the disease. Let us get away!”

Bapu shook his head. "No, we cannot do that. They have been waiting for us so long, poor souls. I cannot go away without greeting them." And so saying, in spite of the protests of his companions, Bapu went to them, talked to them, and left them after a while, happy and comforted.

At another time, a leper went to Bapu's door. He gave him a meal, but had not the heart to send him away. He took him in, dressed his wounds and looked after him. But since he had not the means of keeping him always with him he sent him to the Government Hospital meant for indentured labourers.

At his Ashram in Sevagram many years later, one fine morning a man walked up to Bapu's hut. Bapu recognized him. He was a political worker, had gone to jail many times and was very learned in Sanskrit. He was afflicted with leprosy. He had wandered as a castaway and fasted for a long time out of loathing for his fell disease. Now, with the disease, far advanced, he had come to the Ashram. He had journeyed all the way from Hardwar in the north, where he had lived for many years, as a recluse.

When he saw Bapu, he was overjoyed. "I have now had your *darshan* and am happy. Here is the yarn I have spun for you. I thought I would offer it to you personally. I shall rest tonight under yonder tree. In the morning I shall be gone."

Bapu was touched by his affection. All night he argued whether he should let him go away or take him into the Ashram fold. By morning he had made up his mind. Parchure Shastri, for that was his name, would stay. Bapu had a hut built for him near his own. And every day he would visit him, tend his wounds with his own hands and nurse him.

Such was his compassion.

Once a Baptist missionary invited him to visit a leper colony



in Orissa. Bapu readily went. He spoke to the lepers. Towards the end of his speech he said : “Why should I call these folk my brothers if I do not mix with them?” So saying, he insisted that each of the poor, stricken lepers be brought to him. Many of them showed signs and marks of their disease. But he smiled at them, shook each by the hand, patted their heads and spoke words of cheer to them.

Bapu once said:

“India has a large number of lepers. We usually shun them, and keep them at a distance. We must realize that a leper is as much our brother as any other. On no account should we shun them.”

On more than one occasion Bapu set an example of right conduct towards the poor leprosystricken.

24. WITH THE DISABLED

Bapu had a particularly soft corner for the disabled and crippled. He had a way all his own of dealing with them.

Once Bapu had a letter from a woman of over 70 years of age. She had written : “I have followed your work for many years. I want to tell you that you have been a great comfort to me, blind and deaf as I am. I have typed this letter rather badly. I hope you will be able to read it.”

Bapu picked out her letter from a heap of correspondence and chose to reply to her first. He wrote : “You are neither blind nor deaf. For you have eyes of the soul that can see.”

Bapu always found time for humble, suffering folk.

At another time, a young man of seventeen went to Bapu at Maganwadi in Wardha. He was suffering from a disease called St. Vitu’s Dance, a nervous disorder. He could not control his shaking hands and feet. No one had any use for him. He found life a burden. So, in despair he went to Bapu. He was determined to stay with him.

Bapu’s first thought was of sending him away. What could he do with such a one? But, later, he changed his mind. “If I turn him away, where will he go?” he asked himself. “Let him stay and I shall consider how best to use him.”

Bapu put him to work in the kitchen. Could he help to wash the vegetables? The young man said he would try. By dint

of practice he even learnt to use a knife. Within a few months he was almost normal.

Bapu's gentleness, sympathy and understanding had helped him. The boy had developed enough will-power to get over his trouble.

Bapu's attitude towards the maimed and the crippled reminded one of Christ's concern for them : "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavily laden and I will give you rest. My yoke is easy and my burden is light."

25. FAITH IN NATURE CURE

Where there is absolute purity, inner and outer, illness becomes impossible. The man who eats to live, who is friends with the five powers—earth, water, ether, sun and air and who is a servant of God, the creator of all these, ought not to fall ill. This was Bapu's faith.

Man must strictly observe the rules of personal, domestic and public cleanliness or sanitation. He must take due care in the matter of diet and exercise. Then there should be no occasion for illness or disease.

Whenever there was illness, Bapu did not think of medicine as a cure. Disobedience of Nature's Law and wrong living were responsible for disease. He therefore went to the root cause of the trouble.

His way of obtaining a cure was to bring back the patient to respect Nature's Law. More than drugs it was the right mode of living that would help man's return to health.

This Bapu called Nature Cure. He believed that nine hundred and ninety-nine cases out of a thousand can be brought round by means of proper food, water and earth treatment and similar household remedies. Thus everyone can become his own doctor. Faith in God and the right mode of living were the secret of all health.

26. CALMNESS IN PRESENCE OF DANGER

Once at Tolstoy Farm, in South Africa, Gandhiji told his German friend, Kallenbach, that it was a sin to kill snakes and such other animals. Kallenbach and other European friends there were shocked to hear this.

“If it is improper to kill serpents and the like, we must cultivate their friendship,” thought Kallenbach. He then collected books on snakes and studied them in order to find out their different species. He learnt that not all snakes were poisonous and that some even served as the farmer’s friends, protecting his crops. Kallenbach taught other Ashram inmates how to recognize different kinds of snakes. He also tamed a huge cobra on the farm and used to feed it with his own hands.

Seeing this, one day Bapu said to him : “You do all this in friendly spirit. But your friendliness may not be quite clear to the cobra. Also, your kindness to it is mixed with fear. For neither you nor I have the courage to play with it if it is free. What we need is courage. There is no love in the act of taming the cobra. Our behaviour should be such that the cobra can see through it. Every day we see that all animals can grasp at once whether we love or fear them. Your idea is to study the cobra, not really to get friendly with it. Such study has no place in the case of real friendship.”

In spite of this, Kallenbach could not find it in his heart to set the cobra free. Even Bapu took interest in the life of the cobra

and the children immensely enjoyed seeing it. But one day it escaped from the cage.

People at the Ashram shed much of their fear of snakes.

But Bapu had not totally banned killing them. To have a conviction that there is violence or sin in a certain course of action is one thing. To have the power of acting up to that conviction is quite another. A person who fears snakes and is not ready to risk his life cannot avoid killing snakes in case he finds that he is in danger.

Bapu's own life provided one example of this. It happened at Sabarmati Ashram. It was one chilly evening in 1917. The evening prayer was just over. Bapu sat on his *diwan*, propped up against a pillow. Bapu had covered his back and shoulders with a shawl. Ravjibhai, an Ashram inmate, sat talking with Bapu. Suddenly, he noticed from some distance a strange black line



gently writhing on the white cloth. Leaning forward and observing it intently, he realized it was a large black snake which had climbed Gandhiji's back. Having reached his shoulders, it was looking for something solid which it could climb next.

Bapu saw the look of terror on Ravjibhai's face and asked : "What is the matter ?" By this time Ravjibhai had recovered his usual calm. He knew that if he lost his nerve and shouted or gave the alarm, it might frighten Ba and others. And in the scare, the snake might bite.

So he said to Gandhiji, in a whisper : "Nothing particular, Bapu, it is a snake crawling on your back. Keep still!"

"I shall keep still," Gandhiji said in a steady voice.

"But what do you propose to do?"

"I shall gather the shawl by its four corners and quickly whisk it off your back and shoulder—snake and all."

Gandhiji nodded . "I understand. I shall keep still. But you had better be careful."

Ravjibhai gently tiptoed towards Bapu. By this time the snake had sensed something and curled up in the folds of the shawl. Swiftly Ravjibhai picked up the ends of the shawl and hurried away from the spot. Before the surprised snake could creep out, he had let go two ends of the shawl, opened it and flung out the snake as far as he could.....

Later, Bapu was asked how he had felt during the episode. Bapu replied : " I had one moment of pure terror, but only one! I recovered my presence of mind immediately and then I felt nothing. I only thought that, if the snake bit me, I would say to everyone, "That snake must have nothing to fear because it has bitten me. It must not be killed, but allowed to go free."

27. FEARLESSNESS

In his childhood, Bapu had suffered from fear. He had been afraid of the dark, and of ghosts, as children usually are. One day his nurse, Rambha, taught him the secret of Ramanama. "Recite it whenever you are afraid," she advised, "and you will have no more fear." Bapu tried this, put his trust in God and was never again cowed down by fear—real or imaginary.

To the Ashram inmates he once wrote : "Why should anyone be afraid who knows that God is the Protector of all? By saying that God is the Protector of all, I do not mean that none would rob or harm us. If such fear possesses us, it is not want of capacity in God to protect us : it is our own want of faith in Him.

"The river is ever ready to give water to all. But if one does not go to it with a pot to fetch water, or avoids it fearing the water to be poisonous, why blame the river for it? Fear is a sign of lack of faith."

Bapu seldom lacked this faith. And so he rarely suffered from fear.

Once in South Africa, Bapu found his German friend, Kallenbach, carrying a loaded revolver. He asked him why he did it. Kallenbach replied : "Bhai, I have heard that some bad people are planning to attack you."

Bapu said : "And you want to protect me from such attack?"

Kallenbach replied : “Yes”,

Bapu smiled and said : “Well, now I need not have any fear. You have taken over from God His responsibility of protecting me. As long as you are there, I can consider myself safe from danger. Your love for me has led you to take the place of God for defending me;”

Kallenbach heard Bapu’s gentle banter and put his revolver away.

Again, in Champaran, Bapu was inquiring into the hardship of peasants. The white planters were forcing them to grow indigo on the farms.

One day someone came and told him : “The planter of this place is the worst of the lot. He is bent on murdering you. He has employed bad men to kill you.”

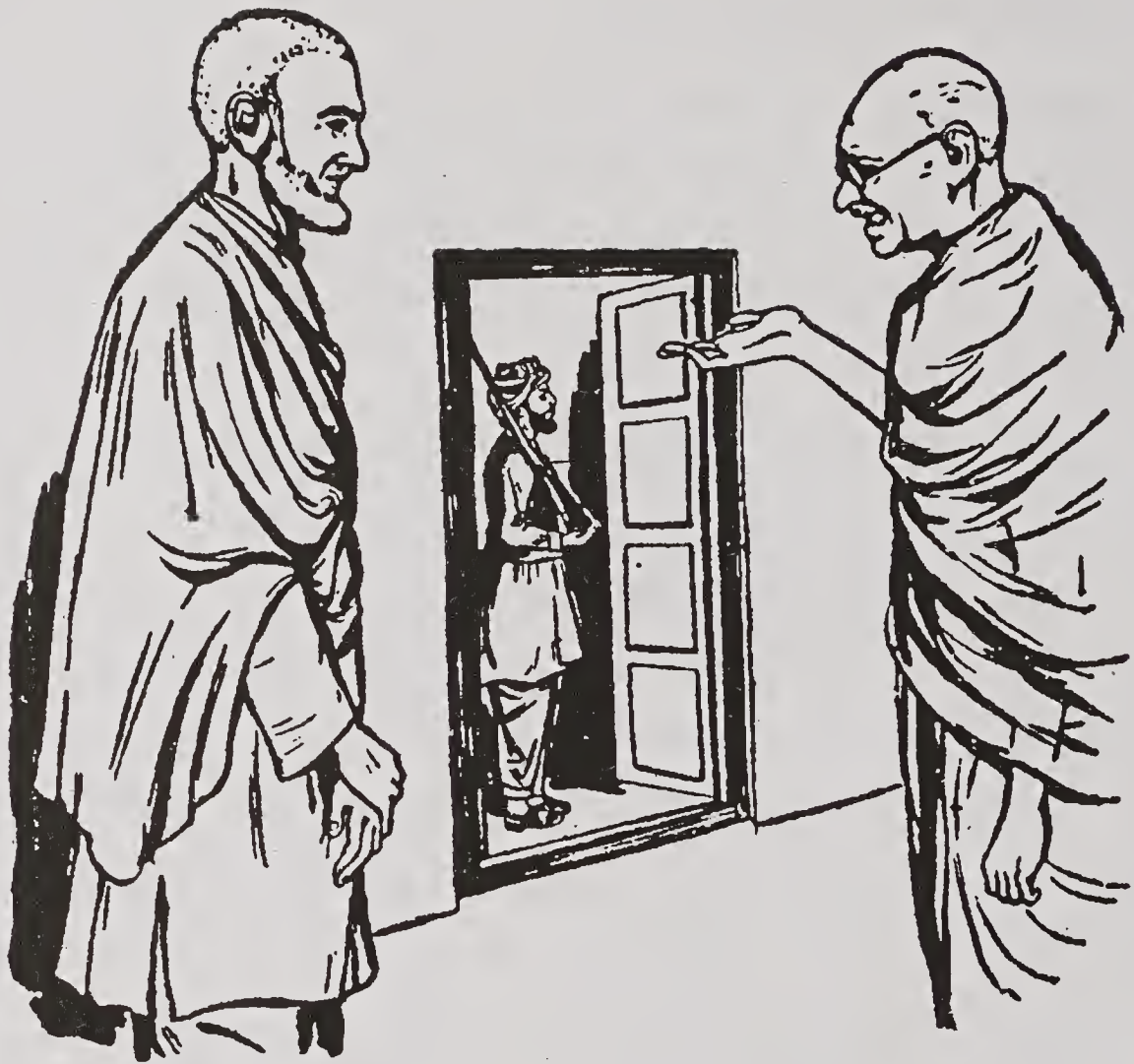
When Bapu heard this, he went out alone in the night to the planter’s bungalow. He told him . “I hear that you have engaged men to do away with me. That is why I have come alone and in secret to your house.”

The planter was struck dumb from shame.

Bapu had in his life many occasions for fear. Most men would have lost their nerve but he faced the situation calmly. He trusted God to protect him as long as He needed him for His work.

This freedom from fear was usual with Bapu. Once Bapu had gone on tour to the North-West Frontier Province. He wanted to see for himself how the hardy Khudai Khidmatgars had become soldiers of *ahimsa* or non-violence.

Bapu was the guest of Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan, the leader of the Khudai Khidmatgars. He was so close to Bapu in his non-violence, that people called him Frontier Gandhi.



At Charsadda, where Bapu had halted for the night, he saw Pathan sentries armed with guns around the house. “What is this,” Bapu asked Khan Sahib, “Why are these armed guards here?”

Khan Sahib replied : “Bapu, they are here only for defence. We want to keep away people who might want to hurt you. The guns are only meant to frighten them.” Bapu shook his head.

“I do not need them,” he said. “Take them away.”

Khan Sahib understood. A man of God seeks no protector but Him. He ordered the guns to be taken away from the sentries. When the brave Pathans saw this, they exclaimed : “Marvellous is this man’s courage. He has no fear of death....”

Yes, Bapu had no fear of death.

How could he have fear who had made it his life's mission to teach people to cast away fear? He had wanted them to be manly, to walk erect, and be unafraid, and look all men in their face. "That nation will be great," he had told them, "which sheds fear and uses death as its pillow."

28. WOMEN WITHOUT FEAR

Women have no need at all to be full of fear, Bapu had said time and again.

He once told the Ashram inmates a story of Mirabai, as an example of fearlessness. Mirabai had gone to Vrindavan and knocked at the door of a *sadhu*. The *sadhu* replied from inside the hut that he never looked at women. Mirabai asked him : “Who are you? I know only one man and that is Shree Krishna.”

On hearing this, the *sadhu* opened the door, bowed at the feet of Mirabai and said, “You have opened my eyes today. I have been saved from an abyss.”

Most people living with Bapu had learnt fearlessness from him. In Wardha, women went to lonely places, walked alone in the night, or lived among strangers. Miraben was one such.

One day Bapu asked her :

“How is it that no one is worried about your living alone in the midst of thousands of men and that all trust you? What have you done to deserve that trust?”

“I have done nothing,” said she, with tears of joy in her eyes. “It is your doing.”

“But I have not treated you with any partiality, as you know to your cost!”

“Even then, it is you who have put that fearlessness into me,

the fearlessness to live one's life in the midst of millions."

During the Salt Satyagraha of 1930, countless stories of the heroism of simple village folk had reached Bapu. Women were not behind menfolk in their bravery and their fearlessness.

One such story particularly moved him to write of it in his paper, *Young India*.

"During the great awakening that took place last year amongst women, there were heroines whose mute work the nation will never know. Now and then one gets information of such village work. Here is one such sample sent by a friend."

And he gave the story in bare outline. The details could be somewhat as follows :

Baladongal was like any of the thousands of Indian villages. During the Salt Satyagraha, Congress volunteers, most of them young boys, were holding a training camp in a nearby town. The Government had banned the Congress. The camp was declared illegal, raided and broken up. The boys were beaten black and blue, some of them till they fainted. A number of them were arrested and among them was Habu, in his early teens, the only son of a poor widow from Baladongal. The others dispersed.

Just as Habu was being hustled into the police van, half-conscious, he whispered to the boys as they were going away: "Go to my village, tell mother what has happened to me. And tell her, too, that I was not afraid of the police, that I stood their beating well."

The boys went to Baladongal and searched out Habu's little hut. They met Habu's mother, told her the police had taken away Habu. But that he had not been afraid of them. They did not go into details.



Habu's mother heard them in wide-eyed silence. Her eyes slowly filled with tears. But she smiled bravely as she said : "Poor me. Why should I cry? Habu has gone to jail so that the Motherland may be free. I am only his mother. I must be proud of him and must not weep."

She insisted on the volunteers staying on in her little hut.

They said : "Are you not afraid of the Police? Suppose they come to know that you have sheltered us. Will they not punish you?"

Habu's mother smiled wistfully. "What could they do to a poor widow? And would it not be nice if they put me in jail too? Habu was never afraid. Let me be worthy of him by being at least as fearless."

The volunteers were silenced. Their eyes glowed with admiration. No wonder Habu was brave.

Night and day she used to cook for the Congress volunteers, who worked in the village. She nursed the sick among them. She consoled those who were troubled in heart. Thus she became a real mother to the boys who, being far away from home, would otherwise have felt motherless. Among them were one or two who were graduates and post graduates. They were proud of their college education. But all of them were even more proud of her simple and rustic boldness, unlettered and poor though she was. And in humility they called her "mother".

Bapu had once said : "The world little knew how much of his socalled 'Mahatmaship' depended on the sacrifice and heroism of countless women, women without fear, no less than men." Without doubt, Bapu had women like Habu's mother in mind.

29. GIFT OF LAUGHTER

Bapu had said on more than one occasion : “If I had no sense of humour, I should have long ago committed suicide.”

Few men in history have carried such great burdens or responsibility on their shoulders as he did. At his bidding in the Freedom Struggle, hundreds of thousands had cheerfully gone to jail, many of them over and over again. Thousands had given up their jobs, lost their property or other belongings. Hundreds had suffered loss of limb, even of life, during the lathi charges and firings ordered by the British Government. Bapu himself went to jail several times, both in South Africa and in India. He suffered many privations. Often he could not have visitors or get newspapers to read. During his last imprisonment, at Aga Khan Palace, Mahadev Desai, his devoted secretary, who was like a son to him, and Kasturba his wife and companion for over sixty years, died. The Government had blamed him for all the trouble in the country. He had thus a heavy cross to bear. Yet throughout his life, his sense of humour, his child-like gift of laughter never left him.

Those who came in touch with him were always struck by his sense of humour. They noticed “his high spirits, his sense of fun, his ability to see the ludicrous side of things. Devadas Gandhi, his youngest son, once said : “Of all memories of Bapu, there is none so abiding as his hearty laugh, born of deep faith.” Faith in himself, trust in God, a belief that all will be well in the end, a habit of seeing the bright side of things and people—these

were the elements which made up the magic of his humour. It was nothing less. For his laughter cast a spell over people around him, infected them and made them laugh too. As one American friend of Bapu, Dr. John Haynes Holmes, has said : “His sense of humour was instant and contagious, his eyes twinkling with a merriment which was irresistible!”

“If I had no sense of humour,” Bapu once wrote, “the attacks I have had to face would have killed me long ago. But I have a living faith in God, and so long as He guides my footsteps, I do not care what people say about me. I take it lightly and can laugh with even those who laugh at me. This is what keeps me going.”

Bapu’s light-heartedness with children was a special quality. Once when he was in Yeravada Prison, a young Ashram girl, Sumitra, had wanted to join him. This Bapu heard of from another Ashram girl, Ninu. He wrote back to her: “Either Sumitra may commit theft and be convicted, appear in male guise, be big after being drawn through a machine and appear to be sixteen years of age, or she should have four instead of two legs and a tail. Then, I may be permitted to keep a cat. Is Sumitra willing to become a cat, with four feet and have a tail? If so, take medicines from Gangaben who is coming here, grow feet and tail and send her!”

Once there was to be a workers’ conference in Gujarat and many workers wanted conveyances. Bapu said : “We want thousands of workers. If all of them demand horsecarriages, our pilgrim band will never reach Dwarka!”

At a meeting where he was to speak, he reached thoroughly tired. He said : “I am glad the address to me has been taken as read. I wish that my speech be also taken as made, though, of course, the purse to me cannot be taken as given!”

Even when ill he would have his wise-cracks. Once he wrote in reply to an anxious enquiry about his health :

“Though the doctors say that the blood pressure is high, I notice no effects of it. And three doctors and three instruments gave three different readings yesterday : 200, 180, 160? ?? What is one to do when doctors differ!”

He did not put too much faith in doctor's prescriptions. Once he wanted a formula for a good washing and toilet-soap. He wrote to a co-worker : “You may remember what Dr. Prafulla Chandra Ray said about tooth powder. He said ‘The tooth powder of the. ... Works was for fools, but chalk or powdered coal was the best toothpowder for wise men. . . !’ Is there no such simple soap prescription for wise men?”

A doctor friend had lost his teeth. Bapu wrote . “What a shame that a doctor becomes toothless, as I am! Ask Haribhai when doctors become ill, in whom should we have faith?”

Many are the anecdotes and instances which show Bapu's light heartedness. And their quality showed itself even when he was dealing with foreigners.

When in London in 1931, during the Round Table Conference which he attended, the famous movie comedian, Charlie Chaplin, called on him. Chaplin was taken aback that Bapu had never heard of him. This made no difference, however, and for the next half hour, it was Bapu that kept the comedian laughing!

During his visit to Lancashire, Bapu met a worker and asked him :

“How many children have you?”

“Eight, sir, four sons and four daughters,” was the

reply.

“I have four sons,” said Bapu, “and so I can race with you half way!” And there was laughter all round.

Bapu had been invited to call on King George V, then Emperor of India, at Buckingham Palace. Court rules regarding formal dress for visitors were suspended in Bapu’s case. He went to the Palace in his usual loin cloth. The event became headline news in Western papers!

A French journalist asked him how it came about. Bapu told him simply . “You in your country have *plus* fours, I prefer *minus* fours !”

To another inquisitive Westerner he is reported to have observed, “His Majesty had on his body clothes enough for *both* of us!”

In any situation, his wit was on the alert. Once an English student asked him : “Why are you so uncharitable to those who drink?” Bapu replied : “Because I am charitable to those who suffer from the effects of the curse!”

While he was in London, Ramsay MacDonald, the British Prime Minister, had wanted to consult him. At the same time, a London postman had walked miles and was waiting outside to see him. Gandhiji chose to see the postman first, saying with a twinkle in his eyes : “I will see the man of letters first. A statesman can wait, for that is his job. He is always waiting for circumstances to force him to move!”

It has been recorded that at a Press Conference, a journalist asked Bapu if he would agree to be Prime Minister of the future Government of a free India. “No,” Bapu is reported to have said : “it will be reserved for younger minds and stouter hands!”

Perhaps, he was thinking of Jawaharlal Nehru. The newspaperman persisted : "Suppose the people want you and insist?" There was a roar of laughter, as Bapu smilingly replied, "I will seek shelter behind journalists like you!"

In my own life, I had an experience of Bapu's unfailing sense of humour. A friend of mine, now no more, and I had been called to meet him at the Nature Cure Clinic, in Poona, in July 1944. There had been some dispute over two books of Bapu's thoughts which my friend and I had compiled, with Bapu's blessings.

It was soon after his release from Yeravada Prison. He was not well and was resting. Mentally he was in much anguish over the situation in the country. Yet there was no outward sign of it. At the end of an hour's talk, in which he permitted us to publish the books, my friend handed over to him a cheque for a thousand rupees or so, our royalties on *Quit India*. It was a book of his thoughts, which had sold by the thousand after his arrest on August 9, 1942. Yet Bapu refused to accept the money, saying : "You are entitled to the fruits of your labour." My friend persisted, saying he was under a vow not to retain it. "But I did not ask you to take the vow?" Bapu observed, but finally accepted the cheque, saying, "It is at your own wish, mind you. After all, I am a Bania, you see... ." His child like laughter that accompanied the remark filled the room as with sunshine, lit up our hearts, and showed us his capacity to laugh even in the midst of a turmoil within.

Examples of Bapu's humour are legion. It was never without a point. It showed his child like nature, his intense humanity and his freedom from complexes. It helped him to meet the buffets of changing fortunes. And, as he said, "Even my jokes are meant to bear a lesson within them."

30. THE PRICE OF PUNCTUALITY

Bapu was very keen on punctuality; he took all his engagements seriously and kept them to the minute, whatever the cost.

On one occasion Bapu was staying at the Sabarmati Ashram and was due to attend a meeting of the Gujarat Vidyapeeth Senate. No vehicle could be sent to him in time. Getting restive, Bapu left on foot; he insisted on reaching the place in proper time. On the way he realized that he could



never make it, walking all the distance. He saw a khadi-clad worker approaching on a bicycle. He stopped him and explaining that he needed to rush to the Vidyapeeth, got on the bicycle and pedalled away for all he was worth. Those who had gathered for the meeting were amazed to see him trundling along to them by bike. It was a rare treat to see the Mahatma cycling!

Typical of the importance he attached to being in time on all occasions is what once happened in Dacca. He was due to speak at a village called Nawabganj. Because of a landslide, the mail train was running late. There was little hope of his reaching the place in time unless he took some extraordinary step. This he did when a co-worker suggested a special train.

“My engagement with the people is to be kept as strictly as any engagement with the Viceroy.” Bapu explained. He went by special train to Goelundo, from where he caught the boat at the right moment and reached Nawabganj in the nick of time for the meeting.

Where punctuality was concerned, he spared none, not even the great.

Once at a political conference at Godhra in Gujarat, Bapu, who was due to address the gathering, arrived punctually. He finished his speech. Lokamanya Tilak was also due to speak, but arrived late. Welcoming him with due deference and respect, Bapu still said in his introduction to the great leader: “Lokamanya is half an hour late. If we are half an hour late in winning *swaraj*, let the sin be on Lokamanya’s head!”

31. ACCOUNTING FOR EVERY PAISA

Quite early in life, Bapu had learnt the value of money. Kaba Gandhi had never hoarded money for his children. He believed it would spoil them. Instead, he gave them a good education. That was why Mohandas hardly knew pocket money. And, when he wanted to go to England for his legal education, he had to run from pillar to post for financial help. It was only the day before he sailed that he could collect money for his passage.

In England, he counted his pennies. He was extremely frugal and kept careful watch on how he spent them.

Once he had overpaid a penny to a fruit-seller and ran after him to recover it, but did not. He never forgot it. The fragment of a diary he kept in his London days and a *Guide to London* that he wrote afterwards talk of prices and bargains in articles of daily use and where to make the best of them. No wonder, for he had to stint every penny. "Without money," he wrote in 1891, "I felt as if I was a bird without wings."

Bapu's advice was : "Let every youth take a leaf out of my book and make it a point to account for everything that comes into and goes out of his pocket, and, like me, he is sure to be a gainer in the end."

Bapu has written in his *Autobiography* of his efforts at thrifty living and noting down his expenses as a matter of daily routine: "I kept account of every farthing I spent, and my expenses were carefully calculated. Every little item, such as omnibus fares or

postage or a couple of coppers spent on newspapers would be entered and the balance struck every evening before going to bed. That habit has stayed with me ever since...”

Quite true. For in 1896, the Natal Indian Congress of Durban had sent him to India, for acquainting people there with the problems and hardships of their countrymen in South Africa. He was given £75 to meet the travelling, printing and out-of-pocket expenses in India. On his return to Durban in December, he submitted a statement of his expenditure for the period July 5 to November 29. In it he mentioned not only major items like railway fare, hotel bills when he stayed in Bombay or Calcutta, bills for printing pamphlets and reports, cost of cables to South Africa or England, but also the smallest items.

These included water charges from half an anna to two annas; charity to beggars or the street magician of an anna each; tips to the telegraph boy, the station peon, guides, gardeners, keepers and porters from one to four annas; tram fare of one anna; ink, or soap or newspaper purchases for an anna each; and sundry purchases like tape, lace, etc. at one anna each.

Bapu being the Secretary of the Natal Indian Congress, had the trust of all and could have easily lumped together miscellaneous odd expenses or even omitted them. But this would never do. Such was his keenness to account for every anna entrusted to him.

At the time of the Boer War in South Africa, during 1899-1902, he collected subscriptions for the Patriotic League Fund from Indians. Those lists and statements of accounts were available even many years later.

He used to receive fairly large donations from India for the satyagraha struggle in Africa, and he rendered account of what

he had received and spent.

We have a beautiful example of Bapu's sense of responsibility in the case of public funds. In 1920 or so, he had planned to have a building for the national school at Ahmedabad. But because of a very serious influenza epidemic in the city, the construction had to be put off. Bapu had received a handsome donation of Rs. 40,000 from a businessman. But he insisted on returning it to him. He said : "The purpose for which the gift was accepted is postponed. I should return the money, till we need it again. Why should we keep other people's money with us?" The donor, of course, did not accept it back.

Of all public funds which he collected during his various movements, he had meticulous accounts kept. He used to say . "If we do not account for every single pie we receive and do not make judicious use of the funds, we shall deserve to be blotted out of public life."

He himself had no personal property and he had never used public funds for his own personal needs. He asked his friends, too, never to do so.

He would spare none, however near or dear to him, if they neglected to account for money given to them or used part of it for their own use. Once Kasturba had kept some petty amount from the Ashram funds for her use. When Bapu came to know of this, he not only openly scolded her, but apologised publicly in his paper for his wife's lapse.

During his Harijan uplift movement, he used to collect cash, gold and silver ornaments for his work. Often at wayside railway stations or places where he halted during a motor car journey, he would collect small coins from the poor. And these would fill several bags. His secretaries and companions had a job of it for

days counting the coins, preparing statements of the collection and publishing lists of donations in Bapu's *Harijan* weekly.

For he always held :

“Public money belongs to the poor people of India than whom there is none poorer on earth. We have to be more wakeful, more cautious, more careful, and let us be ready to account for every pie that we receive from the public. Without properly-kept accounts, it would be impossible to maintain truth in its pristine purity.” This rule he applied to individuals as well as to institutions.

And in this matter, as in all others, he personally set the example; for to him the best precept was practice itself.

32. THE IMPORTANCE OF TRIFLES

In the Sevagram Ashram, there was a board in the dining room : “I hope all will regard the property of the Ashram as belonging to themselves and to the poorest of the poor. Even salt shall not be allowed to be served in excess of one’s needs. Water too may not be wasted.”

Bapu believed in the proverb, “Waste not, want not.” He put great value on thrift.

Bapu would not waste even paper. For example, he would not throw away paper only one side of which was written on. He would use the other side too. He saved for use half-sheets of blank paper from letters which he had received. Even odd bits of paper he would use for scribbling short notes or making drafts. Used envelopes too he would turn inside out and write on them. When he was away from the Ashram and wrote to its inmates, he would put all the several notes in one envelope and post them. Even paper pins and safety pins he would not throw away.

Once Bapu visited a boy’s school hostel. He was sorry to see the conditions there. This was the advice he gave on the occasion : “There should have been a vessel or bucket to collect the water at the foot of the tree where the boys wash. Otherwise all that water would run to waste. Besides, it breeds mosquitoes.

“Some boys were using torn bedsheets. They should have been patched up. Or doubled and turned into quilts. I did much blanket-quilting when I was in jail in the Transvaal. Such blankets

are warm and last long. Torn rags should not be treated as waste. They should be properly washed and kept. They can be used for mending clothes and in a variety of other ways.

“Some boys, I found, do not have sufficient clothing for winter. Some have too much. Why should this be so ? Those who have too much must share their clothes with those who have too little. That would be a fine object lesson in mutual aid.

“I saw bamboo screens on the verandah. Why are these needed ? A verandah must have plenty of fresh air, warm sunshine. The screens shut out both.

“All these may appear to be trifles; but all things are made up of trifles. My entire life has been built on trifles.”

One day Bapu was searching furiously for something. He appeared much upset.

Kakasaheb who saw this asked him : “Bapu, what are you looking for ?”

“A small pencil,” Bapu answered.

Kakasaheb took out one from his attache case to give Bapu.

“No, no, I don’t need this. I want only the small pencil I am searching for,” Bapu said firmly.

“Use this one for the moment, Bapu,” Kakasaheb said, “I shall search for yours later.”

Bapu shook his head. “You do not understand, Kaka. I should not lose that pencil. It was given to me by the young son of a dear friend. And with what love did he run up and give it to me! How can I afford to lose it, though it is only a wee bit of a pencil ?”

They both searched for it and soon found it. It was the little butt of a pencil. But Bapu was at ease only when he had found it. Nothing was too small for him.

His companions had a similar experience; once he had misplaced his handkerchief. He started searching for it all over the place. Others joined in the hunt for it. They offered him another to save him the trouble and as he had to hurry to a meeting. But he would not take it. At night when he put away his small shawl, he found the truant handkerchief pinned fast to it with a safety pin.

33. HOW BAPU ADOPTED THE LOIN CLOTH

“My loin cloth is an organic evolution of my life,” Bapu once explained in *Young India*. How did this evolution take place?

During his student days in London, Bapu put on European clothes. From then on till nearly twenty years after, he stuck to them. The first time he thought of changing them was when the police shot down some Indian strikers in South Africa. He then cast away his western dress as an outward expression of deep mourning and put on the clothes of an indentured Indian labourer. The familiar picture of Bapu as a *satyagrahi* in 1913 shows him in those clothes.

When Bapu returned to India in 1915, he wore typical Kathiawari clothes: shirt, dhoti, turban and shawl. When he went to Champaran two years later, he was still dressed in the same style. But it was there that the change began. While Bapu was inquiring into the troubles of indigo labourers, he saw the terrible backwardness of the Bihar villages. He realized that they would make no progress without proper education. But mere schools also would not do. Education for clean living and sanitation too was necessary.

Bapu formed a band of voluntary teachers for the purpose of village reform. Most of them were inmates of the Sabarmati Ashram. Kasturba, too, whom Bapu had sent for, was among them.

Bapu explained to the workers that they were to teach not

merely grammar and the three R's, but also cleanliness and good manners.

Bapu told them: "The villages are insanitary, the lanes full of filth, the wells surrounded by mud and stink, and the courtyards untidy. The elder people badly need education in cleanliness. They are all suffering from various skin diseases."

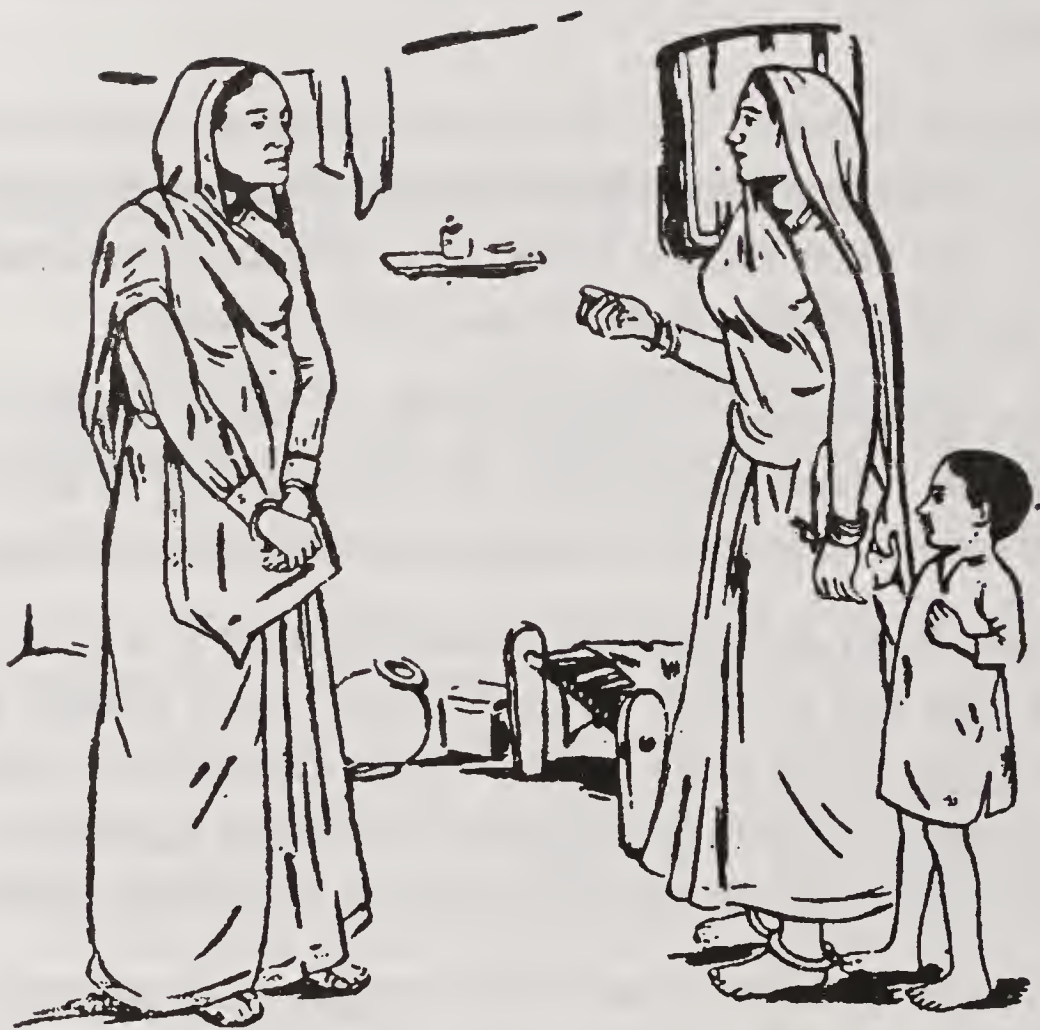
The companions decided to do as much sanitary work among the villages as possible. It was necessary to enter every part of their life. Teams of workers visited various villages.

Once Bapu and Kasturba visited Bhitiharva, a small village where they had set up a school. Nearby was a smaller village. There Bapu found some of the women dressed very dirtily. He was shocked at their uncleanness. He asked Kasturba to talk to them and find out why they did not wash their clothes.

Kasturba spoke to some of the women standing near the hut. One of them took Kasturba inside and said : "Look now, there is no box or cupboard for holding other clothes. The sari I am wearing is the only one I have. How am I to wash it ? Tell Mahatmaji to get me another sari. I shall then promise to bathe and put on clean clothes every day."

Crestfallen, Kasturba reported this to Bapu. He was deeply disturbed. He knew that this poor cottage in Bihar was not the only one such in the country. It was very common. The poor villagers who lived in millions of cottages had not only no furniture, they had not even a change of clothes and covered themselves with rags.

The incident made a deep impression on Bapu's mind. He spoke of it to the people at many meetings. It is possible that it started in his mind the resolve to simplify his dress and bring it more in line with the scanty clothes of the masses.



But the actual change over to the loin cloth came only in September 1921. Bapu has himself told the story of this change.

He was on a tour of the South as far as Madurai. He travelled by train. In the crowded compartment, he saw people who, without exception, were wearing clothes made of foreign cloth. Bapu started talking to them of Khadi. They shook their heads and said: "We are too poor to buy Khadi, and it is so dear."

Bapu thought over what they said. There was some truth in it. But the full truth came home to him with greater force. There were millions of people who were forced by their poverty to wear only a *langoti*. What of them? "What effective answer could I give them?" Bapu asked himself.

The only way in which he could show understanding of their condition was to make his own dress absolutely simple. He had his vest, Gandhi cap and full dhoti on. He must cast them away and take to the loincloth. Only in this manner could he bring himself closer to the poorly clad masses.

Next morning, Bapu called in a barber and had his head shaved. He discarded his cap and his vest. In the place of the dhoti, he wore a piece of khaddar, a cubit in width, around his loins. That was to become his famous loin-cloth, and he wore it to the end of his days.

Years later when, in London, he was asked to explain why he wore so meagre a dress, he said simply: "In India several millions wear only a loincloth. That is why I wear a loincloth myself. They call me half-naked. I do it deliberately in order to identify myself with the poorest of the poor in India."



34. GIFTS OF THE POOR

Nothing gave Bapu more joy than the gifts of the poor. He prized them more than the purses given by the well-to-do. They helped to set up a bond of fellowship with them. Once at a women's meeting, in Andhra, the simple village women made their way to him, with babes on their hips or in their arms.



One by one they loosened the end of their saris tucked in at the waist and, picking up the *pices*, dropped them in Bapu's hands.

And Bapu said : "It gave me great joy when I saw *pice* after *pice* coming into my lap. Those eyes and those hands showed me unmistakably that they were the heart's gifts. They were all that they had. The gifts of those *pices* were richer to me than the calculated gifts made by donors to the purse."

At some wayside Railway Station in Bihar, the train by which Bapu travelled pulled up. There was a rush of hundreds of simple rustic folk for his darshan. They had waited for hours for it. The coins they gave were all covered with green mould. And Bapu said : "This gift is a blessed one. For me it is a sanctification and a dedication."

At another time Bapu was touring the villages of Orissa. Their poverty was terrible. Miraben had suggested that they should really wear fewer clothes than the Oriyas.

Staggered at the sight of their rags, Bapu accepted the suggestion as proper. The poor villagers gave to Bapu what they could—a variety of vegetables; a few untied their kurti and dropped copper coins in his hand. Deeply touched by their condition, Bapu even wished to settle down in their midst and help them.

They were all forms of *Daridranarayan*—God in the Poor.

35. LITTLE KAUMUDI'S SACRIFICE

It happened during Bapu's tour of Kerala, in February 1934. He was going all over the country, collecting funds for Harijan work. He had reached Badagara.

As usual, a large crowd had gathered to greet Bapu and to listen to him. Bapu spoke quietly. He appealed to the women to part with their jewellery. He made it a practice now to sell whatever gifts he received from the people and use the money for Harijan uplift. Bapu said:

“In this country, there are millions of poor people who live in a state of semi-starvation. Eight out of ten people take food which is not enough to satisfy hunger. In such a country it is a crime to wear ornaments. They offend the heart and hurt the eye. True, a woman in our country has hardly any cash of her own. Still the gold and silver jewels she wears belong to her. They are her *Stridhan*. But she dare not part with it without the consent of her lord and master. If she does give it away for a good cause, she does something noble.”

The crowd listened in pin-drop silence. Bapu continued : “Most of the jewellery that you women wear is not artistic or pretty. Some of it is really ugly and collects dirt. Such are your anklets, heavy necklaces, clasps worn—not for holding the hair in place—but purely as a decoration for uncombed, unwashed and often evil-smelling hair. Look at the row upon row of your bangles from wrist to elbow. I think that wearing such jewellery

is a waste and a loss to the country." A silence fell over the crowd. The women looked down. Bapu's words pierced like arrows. But there was no sting in them.

And then came the final appeal.

"Give all such jewellery to me. I will employ it to drive away the evil of untouchability from the country. I will use it for the service of the poor Harijans—the children of God —our own kith and kin."

Just as he had finished, a sixteen-year-old girl made her way through the crowd and walked up to where Bapu was sitting on the wooden dais. She was simply dressed and without guile. She asked gently : "Bapu, may I have your autograph ?"

She did not wait for an answer. She slipped off a gold bangle from her slender left hand and gave it to Bapu. She knew he would ask it of her.

Bapu smiled at her and prepared to put his autograph on a page of the note book she had placed before him. Just then she took off a second bangle, this time from her right wrist and placed it in Bapu's hands.

Bapu was taken aback. He said : "You need not have given both the bangles. I would have given you the autograph for only one of them !"

But this did not stop Kaumudi, for that was her name. Without word, she proceeded to remove the gold necklace. This was not easy. It had got entwined with her long, thick, black tresses. Somehow she forced the ornament at last and, in the full view and admiring gaze of the crowd, she placed it at Bapu's feet.

Bapu was visibly moved. "Have you your parents' per-



mission for this sacrifice ?” he asked her. Kaumudi did not reply. She had not yet completed her sacrificial offering. Now her hands went to her ears. The fingers started deftly unscrewing the jewelled earrings. The crowd, unable to contain its joy at this sight, cheered and clapped.

Bapu drew Kaumudi to him and said : “Kaumudi, my child, you have not yet told me if your parents agree with this act of self-denial.” And then someone near the dais said : “Bapu, Kaumudi’s father is here. He is helping to raise bids for the addresses presented to you and being auctioned. He is no less generous than his daughter, and indeed, is known in these parts for his charities.”

Bapu smiled and, turning to bashful Kaumudi, said : “Look, my child, you have done well in giving me all your jewels. But, see, you must promise never to replace them. Will you?”

Kaumudi nodded vigorously, to reassure him. Bapu inscribed

his signature in her notebook and handed it to her. He said : "Your giving away all your gold is a truer ornament to you than what you have discarded."

The tale of this beautiful act of Kaumudi is incomplete without what happened on the last day of Bapu's Kerala tour, at Kozhikode. Kaumudi and her father had come there to take leave of Bapu. He was curious to know what had inspired Kaumudi to give away all her gold. He asked : "Kaumudi, did you come to the meeting with mind already made up ? Or did you decide on the impulse of the moment ?"

It was Kaumudi's father who replied : "She had made up her mind at home and obtained our consent."

Bapu understood, but wanted to probe her mind a little more. "Kaumudi, will not your mother feel sorry to see your neck, hands and ears bare of jewellery ?"

Kaumudi replied with a knowing smile : "She will be sorry, but I am sure she will not compel me to wear it again."

Bapu was not prepared to let it end there. "But when you get married," he said, while Kaumudi blushed, "as in due course you will, your husband may not like to see you bereft of ornaments. What then will you do ?"

The shy look on Kaumudi's face turned to seriousness. She bent her head in thought.

"You see, Kaumudi," Bapu went on earnestly, "I have a moral difficulty before me. I have written in my paper *Harijan* about your sacrifice. It is wonderful indeed. I have said in the article that you would never wear ornaments again. If you are not prepared for that, I shall have to change that part of the article, or you will have to stand firm against the wishes of your future

husband. You are a Kerala girl, and so very brave. I know you are capable of so doing. Or, you will have to select a husband who will be satisfied to have you without ornaments. Tell me frankly, what do you feel ?”

Kaumudi was listening to Bapu with rapt attention. She turned his words over in her mind. It was a great decision she was called on to make. She thought for a while. Then, as was her wont, she said simply, “I will select a husband who will not compel me to wear ornaments.”

Bapu’s eyes beamed with delight.

“Once, years ago,” he recalled, “there was a woman named Annapurna. She was married, but she discarded all her jewellery at my bidding, promising never to wear it again. She kept her pledge till the moment of her death. She is no more, but now I have you.”

And wherever Bapu went, he spoke of Kaumudi’s sacrifice. For he had written, “It has been my privilege to witness many touching and soul-stirring scenes during a busy life packed with a variety of rich experiences. But I cannot recall a scene more touching than what I saw during my work for the Harijan cause.”

36. HUMILITY

Bapu used to say :

“Truth is not to be found by anybody who has not got an abundant sense of humility. If you would swim on the ocean of Truth, you must reduce yourself to zero.

“The seeker after Truth should be humbler than the dust.

“So long as man does not of his own free will put himself last among his fellowcreatures, there is no salvation for him.

“The mango tree as it grows spreads and bends lower. Similarly, as the strength of the strong increases, he should become progressively more humble; he should become more and more Godfearing.”

Bapu himself was the symbol of true humility. He claimed to be no more than an average man with less-than-average ability. He was a seeker after Truth. He knew his limitations, made mistakes, but never hesitated to admit them. He even confessed “Himalayan” blunders. “I am gifted with enough humility,” he once said, “to look even to suckling babes for help.”

He did not claim to be a Mahatma. He refused to accept that he was a saint. He said : “I do not feel a saint in any shape or form.” He had no desire for prestige anywhere. It was paraphernalia required in the courts of kings. He had no need for it.

More than once he described himself as a farmer and a weaver.

An observer once said of Bapu : “This humble man is unconquerable. His humility is a thing for tears, it is so sincere and touching.”

In the course of one of his prayer addresses Bapu asked : “Of what use is knowledge in which there is no humility or tenderness?” He then recalled the story of the Sage Kaushika.

When a bird dropped dirt on the sage’s body, such was his power that his angry look reduced the little bird to ashes. The sage then visited a house as a guest. The lady of the house was busy serving her husband. So Sage Kaushika had to wait



till she was free to attend to him. When she had finished her duties, she offered food and hospitality to the guest. At the same time she expressed regret for the delay.

The sage lost his temper. But the lady did not show any fear. On the other hand, she calmly observed : “I am not a bird to be reduced to ashes by your anger; besides, such anger cannot be called wisdom.” He learnt a lesson and said: “You have given me two kinds of food today— food to eat and the food of wisdom.” He had learnt the lesson of humility .

37. AT HOME WITH THE LOWLY

Wherever Bapu went, he was attracted to the poor. They were uppermost in his mind. The lowly and the lost, the down-trodden and the despised were to him so many representatives of *Daridranarayan* or God in the form of the poor. Service of God could only mean service of the poor.

To reduce himself to their level was an obsession with him. He believed that the kingdom of God is for those who are meek in spirit. "Let us therefore learn at every step to reduce our needs and wants," he would say, "to the terms of the 'poor' and to be truly meek in spirit."

And this he applied first to his own life. Not to have anything which the masses did not have became a rule with him.

Once at Sabarmati Ashram, Bapu consulted doctors about avoiding the malaria epidemic. It used to come every year. The doctors' advice was simple : "Use the mosquito net."

Bapu said : "How can all afford a mosquito net ? Is there no means which the poorest can afford ?

The doctors suggested one. That was to keep the body properly covered, and to smear the face with kerosene oil. This would keep the mosquitoes away. Bapu accepted this solution.

He gave up the mosquito net and started smearing his face with kerosene oil at bed time.

At another time he was asked by a foreign visitor why he slept on the ground and did not use a thick mattress. Bapu's explanation was : "I do all this to merge myself with the poor millions of India."



He travelled third class on the railways for the same reason.

Once he described his state of poverty thus : "I own no property, and yet I feel that I am perhaps the richest man in the world. For me the dispossession has become a positive gain. My contentment is the richest treasure I have. Hence it is perhaps right to say that though I preach poverty, I am a rich man."

One day Bapu was the guest of a zamindar in Bengal. The latter served Bapu milk and fruit in golden bowls and plates. He knew that they had been provided from the toil of the ryots. Bapu asked : "How can I reconcile myself to these costly luxuries? I would not mind using your gold plates provided your tenants are

comfortable enough and use at least silver plates. But when their life is one long-drawn-out agony, how dare you have these luxuries ?”

In all that he did, the consideration was always whether it would help the poor millions. He once prescribed a talisman : “Whenever in doubt about a particular action, recall the face of the poorest and the most helpless man you may have seen. Ask yourself if the step you are taking is going to be of any use to him. Will he be able to gain anything from it ? And then act.”

All his movements were for improving the lot of the masses. As he once said of the famous Salt Satyagraha: “It was for the poor, semi-starved village people that I pleaded for free salt.”

Talking of Bapu, one could recall Tagore’s words : “The lamp burns and gives the light.” Bapu breathed and lived for the poor.

38. THE CALL OF VOLUNTARY POVERTY

Bapu has spoken on many occasions of how he came to accept voluntary poverty. Once he explained it at some length thus :

In the course of his search for Truth, he had made several discoveries. But the necessity for poverty came to him first of all. The acceptance of poverty was a hard and difficult struggle in the beginning. It meant a wrestle with Kasturba, and, equally, with his children as well. Bapu had vivid recollections of it. He has, himself, told this story.

During his struggle, Bapu came to one definite conclusion. He was cast in the midst of people to whose difficulties he was a witness from day to day. If he had to serve them, he must discard all wealth, all possessions, reduce himself to zero.

The progress in this task of giving up all possessions was slow. It was also painful at first. But as days went by, he saw that he had to throw overboard many things which he considered as his. A time came when it became a matter of positive joy to give up those things. Once he even persuaded his co-worker Kallenbach to throw into the sea a pair of costly binoculars. Those who lived and worked with him had likewise to give up property and possessions.

He saw clearly that the less one possessed the less one wanted, the better one would be. Better for what? Not for

enjoyment of this life but for enjoyment of personal service to one's fellow beings, service to which one dedicated oneself, body, soul and mind.

As one after another the things slipped away from him, he felt that a great burden had fallen off his shoulders. He realized that even if anyone desired to possess such things, he must hold them at the disposal of those who might want them. Whenever they wished to take them, he must be willing and ready to surrender them. That to Bapu's mind was the meaning of voluntary poverty. And he exemplified it in his own life.

39. THE NEED FOR DISCIPLINE

Bapu said :

“I have gone through the most fiery ordeals that have fallen to the lot of man. They have taught me discipline.

“A large majority of us being undisciplined, our daily experience is that of fighting or swearing at one another on the slightest pretext.

“Discipline may be very hard, but I know that it is necessary and beneficial. Discipline is as necessary for the individual as it is for the organization.

“Discipline knows no rank. A king who knows its value submits to his page in matters where he appoints him as the sole judge.

“Discipline is the essence of democracy. And, therefore, a born democrat must be and is a born disciplinarian.

“Nonviolence cannot act madly because it is the very essence of discipline.

“The highest form of freedom carries with it the greatest measure of discipline and humility. Just as a fire or a waterfall cannot be utilised unless skilfully controlled, so awakening too is useless without discipline.

“Voluntary discipline is the first prerequisite of corporate freedom. Without it, *Ramarajya*, which means the kingdom of

God on earth, will remain an empty dream.

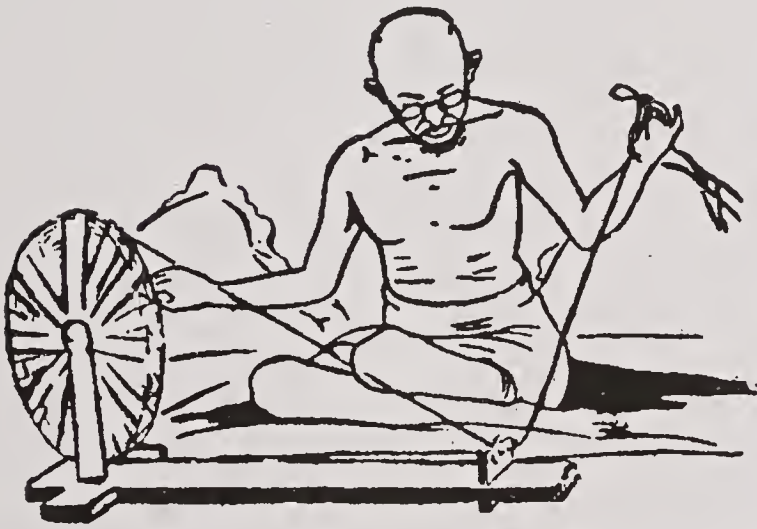
“Discipline is learnt in the school of adversity. And when zealous young men will train themselves to responsible work, without any shield, they will learn what responsibility and discipline are.

“There will have to be rigid and iron discipline before we can achieve anything great and enduring. Mass discipline is an essential condition for a people who aspire to be a great nation.”

40. THE CHARKHA AND THE POOR

Bapu used to say :

“I would go without a meal than without the wheel. “I think of the poor every time that I draw a thread on the wheel.”



He saw that the occupation that could give employment to millions could only be hand - spinning. No other village craft could put so much money into the pockets of the largest number of villagers. The

capital, as well as the organizational effort required, was so little.

Spinning is the Sun and the other village crafts the various planets in the solar system. The Sun gives the warmth of life.

Spinning for the sake of the poor was a sacred obligation. “God dwells more often in the homes of the poor,” Bapu said.

“Hence spinning for the sake of the poor is the Supreme Prayer, the Supreme Sacrifice, the Supreme Service.”

The symbol of *dharma* for India is the spinning wheel. It alone is the friend of the distressed and the giver of plenty for the poor.

Spinning had become a part and parcel of the Ashram prayer. The Ashram inmates believed that in the Charkha and what it stood for, lay the only hope of salvation of the poor.

The message of the spinning wheel is one of simplicity; service of mankind; loving, so as not to hurt others and creating an indissoluble bond between the rich and the poor, capital and labour and the prince and the peasant.

The spinning wheel represented to Bapu the hope of a better life to the masses.

To Bapu, Khadi was the symbol of unity, the economic freedom and the equality of the Indian people. In the poetic words of Jawaharlal Nehru, it is "the livery of India's freedom."

41. THE DUTY OF BREAD LABOUR

God created man to work for his food and said that those who ate without work were thieves. This was Bapu's conviction.

That man must work in order to live, Bapu learnt from Tolstoy's writings on bread labour. Ruskin's book *Unto This Last* only confirmed it. The third chapter of the *Gita* told Bapu that he who eats without body labour eats stolen food.

Bapu believed that this body labour could truly be related to agriculture alone. But everybody is not able to take to it. A person can therefore spin, or weave, or take up carpentry or smithery, instead of tilling the soil. Agriculture can always remain the ideal.

If everybody lives by the sweat of his brow, Bapu believed, the earth will become a paradise. Obedience to the laws of bread labour could bring about a silent revolution in the structure of society. Labour has its unique place in the cultured human family.

Bapu said : "I cannot imagine anything nobler or more national than that, for say, one hour in the day, we should all do the labour that the poor must do, and thus identify ourselves with them and, through them, with all mankind."

Bapu practised this in all his Ashrams: Phoenix Settlement and Tolstoy Farm in South Africa, Sabarmati and Sevagram Ashrams in India.

There can never be too much emphasis placed on work. The Lord has said in the *Gita* : "If I did not remain ever at work

sleeplessly, I should set a wrong example to mankind.”

Finally, Bapu held that *Karmayoga* or, simply, activity, leads to salvation. One who does body labour out of a spirit of service in all humility and for self-realization, gets self-realization. Such a one should never feel reluctant to work. He should ever be tireless.

42. HARIJANS: THE MEN OF GOD

From childhood Bapu's heart rebelled against untouchability. A scavenger boy, Uka, used to come to his house to remove the night soil and clean up the yard. Young Mohandas had strict orders to avoid physical contact with Uka. If perchance he touched him, he had to go through the ritual of a bath to wash away the pollution.

Now Mohandas was a very affectionate, dutiful and obedient child. He would not do anything which went against the respect due to parents. But on this problem of Uka, he disagreed with his parents, particularly with his mother. Of this, he has written : "I told my mother that she was entirely wrong in considering physical contact with Uka sinful. If the Lord pervades water and land and everywhere, how could He not be in Uka also ?"

Perhaps Putlibai found it difficult to answer the question. Stories were not lacking from the Indian Epics to show that untouchability was not always recognized. Did not Guha the boatman, in the *Ramayana*, row Rama, Lakshmana and Sita across the Ganga ? Were they then polluted by the touch of a "low-caste" ? And did not Lord Krishna partake of milk at Vidura's hovel ? So Bapu argued.

"Love of the people," he once explained, "brought the problem of untouchability into my life." His revolt against it began when he asked his mother why touching Uka was a sin.

Many are the episodes which show Bapu's concern for the so-called "depressed classes" or "panchamas" as the "untouchables" were called.

In 1915, Bapu picked up a Harijan boy at Tranquebar in the South. At that time his Ashram was situated at Kochrab, a village some distance from Ahmedabad. Bapu took the boy with him to the Ashram.

He was the picture of dirt. Bapu had his head shaved. He was then given a good wash. His head, eyes, ears, nose were thoroughly cleaned. His nails which had collected dirt were cut. His dust-laden feet were scrubbed and washed.

He was made to wear a simple dhoti, vest and cap. In a few minutes his appearance had so changed that he looked like any boy from a cultured home. This went on almost daily. The lesson in cleanliness was kept up at least for three months.



On another occasion Bapu came across a Harijan boy, ill with light fever. Bapu took charge of him, carried him in his arms to his room, bathed him himself, fed him and nursed him till he recovered.

Bapu even faced serious trouble in the Ashram over the subject of untouchability. A Harijan family, Dudhabhai, his wife Daniben and their daughter Lakshmi, a tiny babe, sought entry into the Ashram. Dudabhai had been a teacher. He readily agreed to obey the Ashram rules. Bapu took them in.

Those who were helping to meet the expenses of the Ashram did not like this. They stopped the funds. This was followed by rumours that the Ashram would be boycotted. Bapu and his co-workers were ready to face all this. Bapu said : "If they do that too, we will not leave Ahmedabad. We will rather go away from the Ashram and live in the Bhangi quarters and live on whatever we can earn from working with our own hands."

Things soon became very difficult. Maganlal Gandhi came and told Bapu : "We are out of funds and there is nothing for the next month." Bapu calmly replied: "In that case, we will go to the Bhangi Colony."

At the critical moment a rich man called, gave Bapu a big sum of money and the crisis was averted. Bapu's faith was strengthened.

Meanwhile, Bapu adopted Lakshmi and brought her up as his own daughter.

He could never bear to see men being humiliated and hurt because they were born "low-caste". He has himself described one or two such incidents.

One such incident took place in December 1927. "It was at Bolgarh, thirty-one miles from the nearest Railway Station, that whilst I was sitting and talking with Dinabandhu Andrews, a man with a halfbent back, wearing only a dirty loin cloth, came crouching in front of us. He picked up a straw and put it in his mouth and then lay flat on his face with arms outstretched and then raised himself, folded his hands, bowed, took out the straw, arranged it in his hair and was about to leave. I was writhing in agony whilst I witnessed the scene. Immediately the performance was finished, I shouted for an interpreter, asked the friend to come and began to talk to him. He was an 'untouchable' living in a village six miles away, and being in Bolgarh for the sale of his load of faggots and having heard of me, had come to see me. Asked why he should have put the straw in his mouth, he said that was to honour me. I hung my head in shame. The price of honour seemed to me to be too great to bear. My Hindu spirit was deeply wounded. I asked him for a gift. He searched for a copper about his waist. 'I do not want your copper, but I want you to give me something better,' I said. 'I will give it,' he replied. I had ascertained from him that he drank and ate carrion because it was the custom.

"The gift I want you to give me is a promise never again to put the straw in your mouth for any person on earth; it is beneath man's dignity to do so; never again to drink because it reduces man to the condition of a beast, and never again to eat carrion, for it is against Hinduism and no civilised person would ever eat carrion."

"But my people will excommunicate me if I do not drink and eat carrion," the poor man said.

"Then suffer excommunication and if need be leave the village.

“This downtrodden humble man made the promise. If he keeps it, his threefold gift is more precious than the Rupees that generous countrymen entrust to my care.”

Bapu did not like the word “untouchables” or that they should be called by degrading names like “panchamas” and “antyajas”. He remembered how Narasinha Mehta, the saint-poet of Gujarat, had claimed the “untouchables” as his own folk and called them “Harijans”.



So Bapu himself started using the word “Harijan”. “Harijan” had a deep meaning to him “a man of God”.

Bapu wanted Harijans to be treated like any other Hindus. So when roads were banned to them in Vaikom, in Kerala, he

approved of a long struggle of satyagraha till the roads were thrown open to them. For many years Bapu had refused to go to temples as Harijans were refused entry there. He was even ready to fast so that they may be admitted to them. As a result of his fasts, many big temples were thrown open to Harijans just as to other Hindus. He undertook a fast to change the British Government's Communal Award, which treated Harijans as separate from the Hindus. He risked his life on more than one occasion for the Harijans, because he believed that Hinduism could not live if untouchability remained. Caste and creed should not divide men. In his religion, there was no room for high and low. All were the children of God.

“The untouchables are bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh. I would love to die so that they may live, and live with perfect dignity and selfrespect. My attitude is that I myself belong to the Depressed Classes.”

Such was his concern and compassion for the Harijans that he went to the length of writing : “I do not want to be reborn. But if I have to be reborn, I should be born an untouchable, so that I may share their sorrows, sufferings and affronts levelled at them, in order that I may endeavour to free myself and free them from that miserable condition.”

To him *Swaraj* would be no *Swaraj* if it did not mean freedom and selfrespect to the lowliest people.

43. THE POWER OF PRAYER

Bapu was a man of faith and prayer. No act of his was done without prayer.

On all occasions of trial Bapu claimed, God had saved him. These trials were sometimes of a spiritual nature, sometimes they came in running institutions, others occurred in politics.



He had his fair share of the bitterest private and public experiences. They threw him into despair for the time being. It was prayer that helped him to get rid of it.

Prayer was part and parcel of his life. It was, as he used to say, the key of the morning and the bolt of the evening. Without prayer, life seemed to be dull and' vacant. "Prayer is to the soul what food is to the body!" Indeed, Bapu believed, food for the body was not so necessary as prayer for the soul.

If only one tried, one would find that daily prayer added something new to one's life, something with which nothing could be compared.

God answers prayers in his own way, never ours. He never answers the prayers of the arrogant, or of those who bargain with him. One must approach God in utter humility, without reservations, fear or doubt.

Bapu never found God lacking in response. He found Him nearest at hand when the horizon seemed darkest. In jail, Bapu had many ordeals. It was never smooth-sailing at such times. But he never had a feeling of God having deserted him.

Prayer, however, was no substitute for duty. Indeed devotion to duty could itself be prayer.

Prayer, according to Bapu needs no speech. It is better to have a heart without words than words without a heart.

Prayer is the most powerful aid for overcoming cowardice and other weaknesses.

Prayer is impossible without a living faith in God. Without prayer inner peace is impossible.

Of the power of prayer, Bapu's life provides many examples.

Once, in 1924, he fasted for 21 days in Delhi, because he wanted that there should be unity among Hindus, Muslims, Parsis and all other communities.

During the fast, Bapu's health suddenly became worse. The doctors were alarmed. They had warned him, before he started the fast, that his health was poor. He might not be able to stand the strain of a long fast.

But Bapu had not heeded them. He had said :

"I shall fast, but not to die. I want to live. So, when at any time, you see that my life is in danger, you may tell me so. I shall then see what to do. If need be, I may even stop the fast."

The doctors now recalled this assurance to Bapu. They told him that his life was in danger. If he continued the fast, he might even die.

Bapu thought for a while. "Will it be dangerous to continue fasting for another 24 hours? After that I shall obey your orders."

The doctors consulted among themselves. They agreed that if Bapu fasted for another 24 hours, the risk would not be too great. But after that they would not take responsibility for his life.

Bapu understood their warning. He continued the fast for another day. He observed complete silence; he shut his eyes and prayed all the time.

The doctors watched by his bedside in anxiety. When the 24 hours were over, they examined him again. Strangely, his condition had not turned worse. On the other hand, it was better than before.

They could not understand it all. "Bapu, you have cheated us," they said. Bapu smiled. It was only the power of prayer.

44. "FATHER, FORGIVE THEM ..."

In Bapu's public life there were several occasions when he was physically assaulted by those who considered him their enemy. Often he stood in danger even of losing his life and narrowly escaped. Yet he would not be party to the punishment of those who had attacked him.

For, he believed that they had acted from ignorance; and that before it the hardest heart must melt and the grossest ignorance must disappear and that suffering without anger and malice was a great force. If that happened, those who attacked him would realize their mistake and give up their hatred of him.

(I) The Footpath Incident

The first incident happened in Pretoria. Bapu always went out for a walk through President Street to an open plain. President Kruger's house was in this street. It was a very modest and simple building. It had no garden and it looked like any other house in the neighbourhood. There was a police patrol before it. This was the only sign that it belonged to an official. Bapu used to go along the footpath by its side, without the slightest hitch or hindrance.

The police patrol on duty changed from time to time. Most of the guards knew Bapu by sight. But once when Bapu was passing by the footpath, the officer on duty was a stranger. He suddenly pushed and kicked Bapu on to the street. Bapu was dismayed. He was about to ask the officer why he had been so



rude and violent. Just then, a Christian friend of Bapu, Mr. Coates, was passing by that road. He had seen the whole thing happening. He hailed Bapu and said : “Gandhi, I have seen everything, I am sorry.

I shall gladly bear witness in court to the rudeness of the man who has assaulted you like this.”

Bapu replied : “You need not feel sorry. What does the poor man know? To him all black people look alike. He no doubt treats Africans just as he has treated me. I have made it a rule not to go to court for any personal grievance.

So I do not propose to proceed against the policeman.”

Mr. Coates was much impressed by what Bapu said. “That is just like you. But do think over it again. We must teach him

a lesson.”

He then scolded the Boer policeman. The latter realized his mistake and was sorry. He expressed his regret to Bapu. There was really no need. For Bapu had already forgiven him.

(II) *The Durban Assault*

The second incident, a very serious one, occurred in January 1897. The year before, Bapu had returned to India on a brief visit. He had two objects in mind. One was to fetch his family which he had left behind. The other was to tell the people at home of the hardships their brothers were suffering in South Africa.

When Bapu reached Rajkot, he wrote and published a small book about the grievances of the Indians in South Africa. It became known as the “Green Pamphlet” because of its cover. A summary of its contents was cabled by *Reuter* to London newspapers. An even briefer summary reached the South African newspapers. It gave the impression that Bapu had accused the South African Europeans of much injustice. They were enraged.

Soon, they learnt that Bapu was returning to South Africa. On board his ship, and another that sailed with it, were a large number of Indians. To the whites it looked an “invasion”. The whites set up a committee to rouse public opinion against it. They started an agitation. When the ships reached Durban harbour, the passengers were not allowed to land. The pretext was that there might be disease on the ships and that therefore they should be put in quarantine.

Men, women and children on board, with Bapu in their midst, suffered much hardship. Many days passed before they were allowed to land. Mr. Laughton, a European lawyer friend of Bapu went on board the ship to him and advised him to land. He thought

there was no risk. Bapu got down at the Point in Durban Harbour. The news of his landing had already reached the crowd of whites and natives. Soon, it became an angry mob. Someone saw and recognized Bapu. He shouted “Gandhi! Gandhi!”

The mob followed Bapu and Mr. Laughton. Every moment it grew larger and more excited. By the time Bapu had reached West Street, it had grown violent. Mr. Laughton was pulled away and separated from Bapu. The rioters then set upon Bapu, abused him, and threw stones and rotten fish at him. They snatched his headgear and threw it down. A burly fellow came up to Bapu, slapped him in the face and kicked him. Bapu nearly fainted and caught hold of a fence nearby, to save himself from falling down. He hung on to it for some time till he recovered a little. He then attempted to move forward. He had given up hope of reaching home alive. Kasturba and others had already preceded him and reached safely.

Blows started raining on him again. He would have been lynched but for a European woman, Mrs. Alexander, wife of the Police Commissioner, who rushed to his aid with her parasol. She warded off the blows and shielded him till help came. Bapu was rescued and, after escaping in disguise from a house which was besieged by the mob, finally reached home.

Soon after, the Attorney General of Natal, Mr. Harry Escombe, called on him. He had received orders to have the incident investigated. “We desire that the offenders should be brought to book. Can you identify any of your assailants ?” he asked.

Bapu replied : “I might perhaps be able to point out one or two of them. But I must say at once, before this conversation proceeds, that I have already made up my mind not to prosecute



my assailants.”

“Why so?”

‘I cannot see that they are at fault. What information they had, they had obtained from their leaders. It is too much to expect them to judge whether it was correct or otherwise. If all that they heard about me was true, it was natural for them to be excited and do something wrong in a fit of anger. I would not blame them for it.’

“But they nearly lynched you? It might have been serious but for timely help?”

“Excited crowds have always tried to deal out justice in that manner to those whom they considered as wrongdoers. If anyone is to blame, it is the Committee of the Whites, you yourself and, therefore, the Government of Natal.”

“How do you say that?”

"*Reuter* might have cabled a distorted account of my work in India. But when you knew that I was coming to Natal It was your duty, and the duty of the Committee, to talk to me first. You should have questioned me about your suspicions concerning my work in India, heard what I had to say and then done what might have appeared proper to you in the circumstances."

Mr. Escombe understood.

"But now that the mischief has been done,...."

Bapu interrupted him.

"No, I cannot prosecute you or the Committee for the assault. And even if I could, I would not seek redress in a court of law. Whatever steps you took you took in the belief that you were safeguarding the interests of the whites in Natal."

"So you do not propose to help Government in punishing those who attacked you?"

"I have already told you—no. They did so in ignorance. It remains for me to fight with you in the political field, to convince you and the whites about the position of the Indians. They form a large proportion of the population of the British Empire. They wish to preserve their self-respect. At the same time, they wish to safeguard their rights without injuring the whites in the least."

Mr. Escombe was deeply impressed by Bapu's fairness and nobility. He could only shake his head in silence. He finally said : "My Government would need a note from you that you are unwilling to prosecute the offenders. Will you give it to me?"

Bapu agreed, wrote on a sheet of paper and handed it over. It read:

"When I decided to land and proceed with Mr. Laughton, I

had made up my mind that I should not feel aggrieved in case I was injured.... Prosecuting my assailants is, therefore out of the question. This is a religious question with me and I believe that I should serve my country, as well as myself, by this act of self-restraint. I propose therefore to take all the responsibility on my shoulders.”

There was no room in Bapu's heart for hatred or revenge.

45. MIR ALAM's ATTACK

It was in 1908, at the time the "Black" Registration Act had greatly upset the Indians in the Transvaal. That Act had required them to give impressions of all the ten fingers. Bapu had advised against this, because it branded the people as criminals. They therefore prepared for "passive resistance".

The South African Government appeared anxious for a compromise. It said that if the Indians registered of their own accord, the Black Act would be withdrawn. Taking the Government at its word, Bapu advised the Indians to register voluntarily.

This was gravely misunderstood by some of the Pathans in Pretoria. Mir Alam was their leader.

They believed that Bapu had accepted a bribe from the Smuts Government and betrayed the community. They cross-examined Bapu. One of them said : "We will never give the finger prints nor allow others to do so. I swear with Allah as my witness that I will kill the man who takes the lead in applying for registration."

Bapu denied that he was "selling" the community. The finger-prints had to be willingly given.

He said :

"I must confess 'however' that I do not like the threat of death which the friend has held out. I also believe that one may

not swear to kill another in the name of the Most High. This friend, I think, has been overcome by a momentary fit of passion. It is my clear duty to take the lead in giving finger prints."

Bapu went on :

"Death is the appointed end of life. To die by the hand of a brother, rather than by disease or in such other ways cannot be for me a matter for sorrow. And if even in such a case, I am free from the thoughts of anger or hatred against my assailant, I know that that will redound to my eternal welfare. And even the assailant will later realize my perfect innocence." The meeting broke up. The Pathans, however, appeared sullen and unconvinced.

The appointed day came. Bapu reached his office. It was also the office of the Satyagraha Ashram. He found Mir Alam standing there. With him were his companions.

Mir Alam was an old client of his. He used to seek Bapu's advice in all matters. Many Pathans in Transvaal worked as labourers to make straw or coir mattresses and sold them at a good profit. Mir Alam too earned his living in the same way. He was a large and wellbuilt man, full six feet in height.

Bapu greeted Mir Alam, but he did not return the salute. He did not smile and appeared to be in a huff. His eyes seemed to have anger in them. Bapu took note of it. He had a feeling that something was going to happen.

Bapu entered the office, and, with a few friends, proceeded to the Registration Office. Mir Alam and his friends followed, at a distance.

When they arrived at the Office, Mir Alam asked Bapu: "Where are you going?"

Bapu said : "I am going in to give the ten finger prints. But for you I shall arrange to have only two thumb impressions taken." Bapu had hardly finished speaking when a cudgel blow fell on his head. Bapu fainted and dropped to the ground, with the words : "Hey Ram!"



There he lay, prostrate and senseless, on the road. Had Yusuf Mian and Thambi Naidoo, two of his associates, not defended Bapu, anything could have happened.

European passersby caught hold of Mir Alam and his friends and handed them over to the Police.

Rev. Doke, to whose house Bapu was finally removed and who nursed him back to health, has told the rest of the story :

When Bapu recovered consciousness, he was lying in an office nearby to which he had been carried. He (Rev. Doke) saw

him a moment later. Bapu was helpless and bleeding. The doctor was cleansing his wounds. The police officers watched beside him.

Bapu asked : “Where is Mir Alam ?” “He has been arrested along with the rest,” he was told.

Bapu said : “They should all be released.”

With whatever little strength that was left in him, he insisted that no action should be taken to punish those who would have mortally wounded him.

“They thought they were doing right,” Bapu said, “and I have no desire to prosecute them.”

When, subsequently, the Crown authorities tried and sentenced Mir Alam and the others, Bapu refused to tender evidence against them.

It was a classic instance of Bapu’s freedom from the desire to punish or retaliate against those who had offered violence to his person. He bore no malice towards them.

46. THE BOMB AT THE PRAYER MEETING

On the prayer ground at Birla House, on January 20, 1948, a bomb exploded. At the time, Bapu thought that it was military practice. After prayers he realized that it was a bomb meant for him. It had blown up a portion of the compound wall.

Bapu spoke of the incident at the next day's prayer meeting. The Police had arrested the young man who had thrown the bomb. Probably the misguided youth who had thrown the bomb had considered him an enemy of Hinduism. But violence was not the way to save Hinduism.

Bapu had spoken to the Inspector-General of Police not to harass the youth. They should try to win him over. They should convert him to right thinking and doing. The young man and those who guided him were bound to realize their error. It was a wrong done to Hinduism and the country.

Bapu finally warned his listeners not to be angry with the young man. The man did not know that he was doing anything wrong. They should pity him. With Bapu, it was the same thing all over again, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

47. ALL MEN ARE BROTHERS

During Bapu's childhood, his mother, Putlibai, used to take him to all places of worship : to the temple of Vishnu and the Mandir of Siva, to the Jain temple and a Fakir's shrine.

At Rajkot, the house of Kaba Gandhi was open to men of all religions : often, as young Mohandas was massaging his father's feet, he would listen with rapt attention and much interest to the religious discussions among Hindu pandits, Jain monks, Muslim mullahs and Parsi priests, which Mohandas' father used to hold at his place. From all this, Mohandas learnt to have equal regard for all religions.

In Bapu's eyes, religions were different roads towards God. And he recognized and constantly declared that the soul of all religions is one.

In South Africa, at Tolstoy Farm, there were families following different religions. And yet there was perfect understanding and harmony among them in following their respective religious practices. Indeed, at Ramzan time, the Hindu boys helped their Muslim playmates to have their morning and evening meals at the right time and early enough. And the Hindu boys often took only one meal in the evening to keep their Muslim friends company.

One day, in 1947, when Bapu was on his walking tour in Naokhali district, he halted for rest at a village called Dharampur. A villager showed him the branches of a tree in the

neighbourhood, saying : “Look, Bapu, this tree has two kinds of leaves. Is this not strange?” Bapu shook his head and said, with a laugh, “No, there is nothing strange about it. These two different kinds of leaves on one tree are like the Hindus and the Muslims, children of the same soil. But see how the leaves are flourishing side by side on the same tree. They tell us that we should live on the same soil as brothers just as they, the leaves, are growing on the same tree.”

Bapu wanted every Hindu to become a better Hindu, every Muslim to become a better Muslim, every Christian to become a better Christian and so on. Each one’s religion is good for him and should help him to make him better and better still.

One must follow the best in his own religion and entertain equal regard for the other religions and their followers. We are all Indians first, and Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Christians, etc., afterwards. All of us belong to India and India belongs to all of us. For all men are brothers.

48. FOR A BETTER WORLD TOMORROW

Bapu said :

“Will our world always be one of violence? Will there always be poverty, starvation, misery?

“Will we have a firmer and wider belief in religion or will the world be Godless?

“If there is to be a change in society, how will that change be brought about? By war or revolution? Or will it come peacefully ?

“The world of tomorrow will be, *must be* a society based on non-violence. This is the first law; out of it all other blessings will follow.

“It may seem a distant goal, an impractical Utopia. “But it is obtainable; for it can be worked for, here and now.

“Individuals, groups and nations must adopt the way of nonviolence, the way of love.

“I see then no poverty in the world of tomorrow, no wars, no revolutions, no bloodshed.

“And, in that world there will be a faith in God greater and deeper than ever in the past. The very existence of the world, in a broad sense, depends on religion. All attempts to root it out will fail.

“A world federation, a ‘One World’ can be built only on a foundation of non-violence. Violence will have to be totally given up in world affairs.”



“A world federation, a ‘One World’ can be built only on a foundation of non-violence. Violence will have to be totally given up in the world affairs.” The present book aptly ends with this saying of Gandhiji and that truly had been the essence of his life.

This book written in a simple, narrative style with many illustrations will help the readers in understanding the great yet humble and unassuming personality of the Father of the Nation. It will definitely make an interesting read about this world personality both for children as well as adults alike.

The author of this book Shri U. R. Rao had been a prolific writer and a man of varied interests. His chief interest, however, lay in Gandhian studies. The study of Gandhiji’s life and work was his life-long mission and he propagated the ideas of the Mahatma in every possible way.



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